

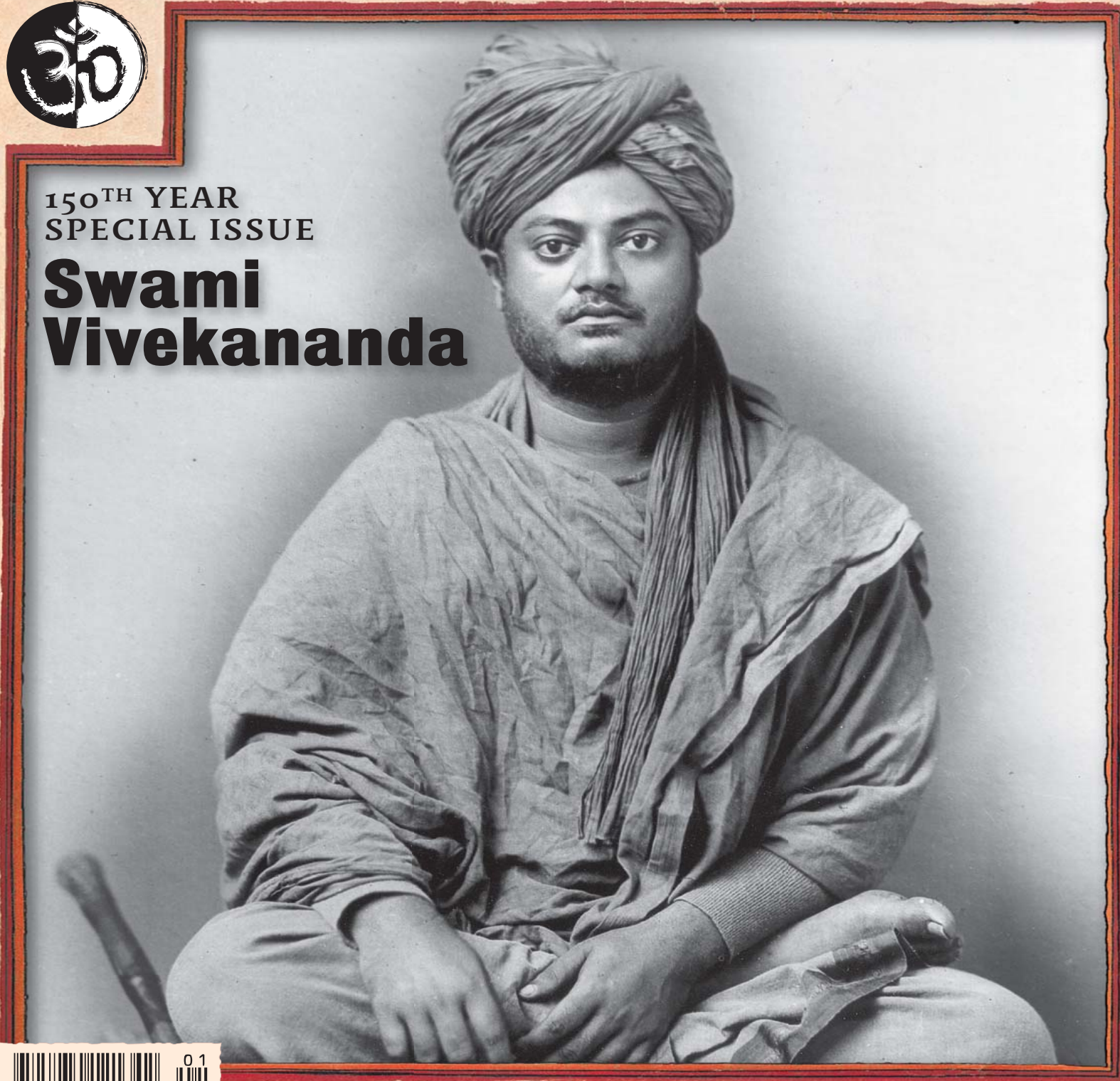
HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



150TH YEAR
SPECIAL ISSUE

Swami Vivekananda



VEDANTA SOCIETY OF ST LOUIS



SHUTTERSTOCK

COVER: Swami Vivekananda in Jaipur, 1891, during his years of wandering; (above) our Insight, page 18, explores a host of sensitive medical issues, including prolongation of life, suicide, blood transfusions and organ transplant.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2013 • HINDU YEAR 5114
NANDANA, THE YEAR OF HAPPINESS

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Parvathy Baul is more than a singer; she is a singing yogi. She shares, “Indian yogis have always emphasized singing as a way to experience true surrender in divine love. By invoking the beauty and the thought of the beloved, you invoke the beloved inside you.” **...page 64**

.....
Parvathy Baul performs at the Fes Festival in Morocco, July, 2010. Bengal's age-old Baul tradition of song and dance incorporates simultaneous movements of the hip-drum, one-stringed drone and anklet bells.



GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

India's Religious Youth

IN A POLL COMMISSIONED BY *Hindustan Times* in early August, one thousand randomly selected Indian youth of all faiths, from six major metropolitan areas, answered a variety of questions to reveal the role of religion in their lives. Overall, the poll indicated religion is a significant component.

TO THE QUESTION "DO YOU consider yourself religious?" Only nine percent said "no" or "don't care," while 91% replied, "yes"—32%, " staunchly," and 59% "moderately/occasionally/so-so." By comparison, a 2000 study by Barna Research Group in the US indicated 64% of US teens say they are religious.

ASKED WHETHER THEY HAD read their religious scriptures, only 15% said they had personally read them, while 22% learned mostly from their parents and 33% mostly from books, TV series and popular culture. To a related question, about the formation of their religious beliefs, 68% credited their parents (whom most considered more devout), 21% general society and 11% their own study and understanding.

THE YOUTH GOT MIXED grades for understanding and

participation. Only 34% could explain "the religious reasons behind rituals such as fasting," and just 10% said they dress according to their religious beliefs. On the other hand, 64% visit a place of worship at least a few times a month.

THIRTY PERCENT CONSUME food according to their religious belief, while 24% "follow important tenets like praying as per your faith."

THERE WAS A SHARP DISTINCTION between men and women on marrying outside their faith. Only 17% of the women said they would, compared to 32% of the men. Fully 89% would encourage their children to be religious.

THE POLL DID NOT TAKE INTO account the religion of the respondents. If it was a cross section of Indian society, the group would be about 82% Hindu, 12% Muslim, 25% Christian and 2% Sikh. There were significant indicators of a desire for religious harmony: 77% want religion kept out of politics, and 65% willingly take part in rituals and festivals of other religions.

MADHU KHANNA, PROFESSOR, Centre for Comparative Religions and Civilizations, offered



Religion, a part of life: A young woman meditates on a beach in India. Like many other youth in India, her religion can help her stay grounded and content in an increasingly fast-paced world.

her analysis of the results to the *Hindustan Times*: "The new generation is not interested in the old form of religiosity. While some may believe practitioners not knowing their beliefs is a sign of the decline of religion, it can also be viewed as an emergence of an alternate way of practicing. In our country, there are no avenues to understand the

true leanings of religion. Every secular nation has a department of religious studies at universities. India has none."

OVERALL THE POLL WAS ENCOURAGING. The vast majority of youth consider themselves religious to a significant degree, most attend places of worship and nearly all plan to encourage their children to be religious.

USA

California University Establishes Hindu Program

IN AN AUGUST 24 PRESS RELEASE, Claremont Lincoln University in Southern California announced that they and the Nalanda Confluence Institute had agreed to establish a graduate program in Hindu Dharma studies at Claremont. The release states, "Both institutions share the belief that when the world's religious traditions work together, instead of separately,

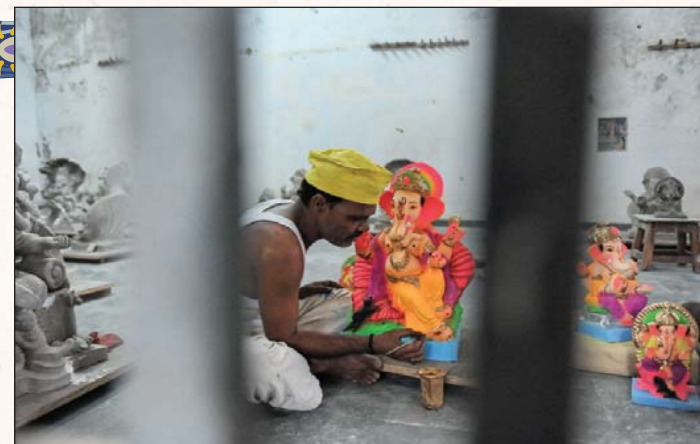
they are much better equipped to address the most urgent global issues that we face today."

THE PROGRAM WILL OFFER several degrees, including master's degrees in Hindu studies, Hindu clinical pastoral chaplaincy and Hindu theology/philosophy, as well as a degree in Hindu contemplative, yogic and consciousness studies, applied dharma, and other initiatives in partnership with Hindu spiritual institutions and community organizations.

CLU IS A DIVISION OF the accredited Claremont School of Theology founded by the United Methodist Church. In recent years the School of Theology has expanded with programs that are "interdisciplinary, multicultural and multireligious."



Hindu Studies signing ceremony: CLU Provost, NCI Dean Debashih Banerji, CLU president Jerry Campbell, NCI chairman Navin Doshi, and NCI president Rita Sherma



Ganesha's helper: An inmate in Ahmedabad jail paints an environmentally friendly image of Lord Ganesha made from clay

INDIA

Prisoner-Produced Deities

AHMEDABAD'S SABARMATI Central Jail has hit upon a satisfying and profitable inmate activity: making eco-friendly clay Ganesha statues for sale during Ganesha Chaturti in September of each year, with the profits going to benefit the Prisoners' Welfare Fund.

P.C. THAKUR, A PRISON OFFICIAL, explained to the *Times of India* that they started the project after the city banned Deities made of plaster of paris for ecological reasons. Kishan Bhati, a

convicted murderer from a family of deity makers, was delighted. He helped to train eight others for the task, including some Muslims who joined enthusiastically.

"WORK IS LIKE WORSHIP FOR US," Kailash told the *Times*. "We forget time and space when immersed in the process. It is satisfying to learn that the deities made by us will end up at people's houses and will be revered." The training program will be expanded next year to meet the demand for the deities.

FAMOUS VEGETARIANS

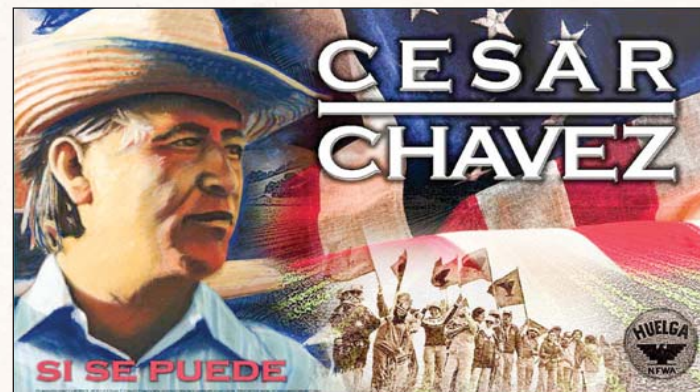
César Chávez, Labor Activist

CESAR CHAVEZ (1927-1993) was a Latin American civil rights activist and cofounder of *The United Farm Workers*. He led a historic movement for the rights, not only of American farm workers, but also of working people in cities and towns across the nation.

CHAVEZ WAS INSPIRED BY Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Born to a family of migrant farm workers, Chavez directly experienced the segregation and harsh treatment of Mexican Americans working on California's commercial farms. Using Gandhi's tactics of non-violence, civil disobedience and even fasting, Chavez organized a powerful national movement in the 1950s and 60s, eventually winning significant rights for farm laborers.

IN A SPEECH TO GRAPE PICKERS in California, he echoed Gandhi's wisdom: "If someone commits violence against us, it is much better we not react against the violence but that we react in such a way as to get closer to our goal. People don't like to see a nonviolent movement subjected to violence, and there's a lot of support across the country for nonviolence. That's the key point we have going for us. We can change the world if we can do it nonviolently."

IT IS NOT WIDELY KNOWN THAT Chavez was a vegetarian. In 1992, during his acceptance of a Lifetime Achievement Award from In Defense of Animals (IDA), he explained his view: "We need, in a special way, to work twice as hard to make all people understand that animals are fellow



A simple truth: "I became a vegetarian after realizing that animals feel afraid, cold, hungry and unhappy like we do. I feel very deeply about vegetarianism and the animal kingdom."

creatures, that we must protect them and love them as we love ourselves. And that's the basis for peace. The basis for peace is respecting all creatures. We cannot hope to have peace until we respect everyone—respect ourselves and respect animals and all living things. We know

we cannot defend and be kind to animals until we stop exploiting them—exploiting them in the name of science, exploiting animals in the name of sport, exploiting animals in the name of fashion, and yes, exploiting animals in the name of food."

INDIA

Kanwariyas' Arduous Trek

THROUGHOUT THE SACRED month of Shravan (July/August) millions pilgrimage to the Ganga to fetch Her holy waters to bless their homes and lives. The trek is traditionally done on foot, many walking hundreds of kilometers from their villages and towns. Their name comes from the pole that each carries, known as a *kanwar*, which holds a pot at each end to carry the water collected.

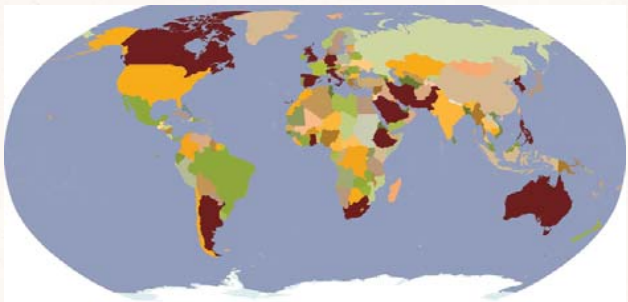
THE JOURNEY IS ARDUOUS,

involving blistered feet, little food and the dangers of road accidents; each year a few are injured or killed. Even so, everyone still considers it a powerful and uplifting experience.

SAID ONE PILGRIM, "KANwariyas don't undertake this journey for penance. They perform it for two reasons—to thank God for fulfilling one's wish, or to tell Him to let things stay as they are. Kanwariyas are mostly satisfied people."



En route: Camps are set up during Shravan to shelter and feed hundreds of thousands of Kanwariyas, such as these from Delhi



WORLD

Indian States Equal to Entire Countries!

IN THE LAST 10 YEARS INDIA'S POPULATION HAS INCREASED by 181 million people, reaching a total population of 1.21 billion as of 2011. At right we reproduce a fascinating population chart that is circulating on the Internet. It compares the population of India's 15 largest states with that of entire countries. The population of all those countries (shown in red on the map above) taken together doesn't equal India's.

AS DIVERSE AS THESE 15 NATIONS ARE, SO TOO ARE EACH OF these 15 Indian states. We might consider why a country like Germany, with a population smaller than any of the five most populous Indian states, takes up such a large amount of mental real estate on the world stage, and especially in our education systems. Ask an average Western student about Germany and you'll learn of its medieval and recent history, its aggression in the First and Second World Wars, its engineers and beer, and you might even hear a few words of Deutsch. Ask that same student about the far more populous Indian state of Bihar and you'll get a blank stare, or at best a mention of its tiger population. But Bihar, home of the Maurya Empire and birthplace of Buddhism, surely deserves at least adequate reference in the teaching of world history.

Indian State	Population	Country	Population
UTTAR PRADESH	166,052,859	PAKISTAN	176,745,364
MAHARASHTRA	112,372,972	PHILLIPPINES	92,337,852
BIHAR	103,804,637	GERMANY	81,799,600
WEST BENGAL	91,347,736	ETHIOPIA	84,320,987
ANDHRA PRADESH	84,655,533	IRAN	75,149,669
TAMIL NADU	72,138,958	UK	62,262,000
MADHYA PRADESH	72,597,565	ITALY	60,813,326
RAJASTHAN	68,621,012	FRANCE	65,350,000
KARNATAKA	61,130,704	SOUTH AFRICA	48,810,427
GUJARAT	60,383,628	SPAIN	47,190,493
ORISSA	41,947,358	ARGENTINA	41,281,631
KERALA	33,387,677	CANADA	34,928,000
JHARKHAND	32,966,238	SAUDI ARABIA	28,376,355
ASSAM	31,169,272	NORTH KOREA	24,554,000
PUNJAB	27,704,236	GHANA	24,233,431
HARYANA	25,353,081	AUSTRALIA	22,737,609

Immense India: The latest census shows India now makes up over 17% of the world's population, with 1.21 billion people. Its population is still growing.

BRIEFLY...

AIR-POLLUTING HAMBURGERS

were the subject of a recent study by the University of California Riverside. Researchers took a close look at the broiled burgers found in fast-food restaurants and found that the grease and smoke from their cooking emits a huge amount of particulates into the air. Bill Welch, a principal engineer, stated, "For comparison, an 18-wheeler diesel engine truck would have to drive 143 miles on the freeway to put out the same mass of particulates as a single charbroiled hamburger patty."

AN OFFENSIVE TELEVISION SHOW

in Indonesia has recently been canceled after protests from

Hindus in Bali. The show, entitled "Nine Saints," portrayed the men who were said to have brought Islam to Java. Hindus complained that it was a negative and historically inaccurate portrayal of the Hindu Majapahit Kingdom, which ultimately fled to Bali.

171 HINDU PILGRIMS FROM PAKISTAN now in India have requested refugee status, complaining they lived in miserable conditions and faced increasing extremism, such as forced conversion, extortion and kidnapping. The Samenath Lok Sangathan, a Hindu welfare organization, is working with the government to provide them a formal immigration path.

MAORI-INDIAN MARRIAGES

in New Zealand have resulted in about 2,600 people of mixed descent. A bicultural gathering scheduled for early October will offer this group a chance to attend workshops on vegetarian cooking, Hindu art, Maori traditional tattoos (removable ink) and yoga. Women attending will have a chance to learn sari draping.

NEW LAW PROTECTS SIKHS AND Muslims against bias in the workplace. *The Los Angeles Times* reports that California employers will have to face new restrictions against giving Sikh and Muslim employees only back-room jobs. Governor Jerry Brown stated the bill makes it clear such discrimination is unacceptable.

A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY

Education World places Chinmaya International Residential School at Coimbatore as No. 1 among all boarding schools in the state of Tamil Nadu and No. 9 across all India, an extraordinary distinction.

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HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Hindu AND American

How unity in diversity defines my religion, my country, its people and myself

BY SARIKA PERSAUD

THOUGH AMERICA IS CON-
ventionally seen as a
country based in Abra-
hamic values, one can
easily see how seamlessly the
values of Sanatana Dharma, or
Hinduism, compliment tradi-
tional American ideals. From
my own experience, I have ob-
served how Sanatana Dharma
and the idea of being an Ameri-
can create a larger sense of pur-
poseful direction within an individual.

Sanatana means eternal, and *dharma*
means duty or purpose; thus, Sanatana
Dharma is a way of life, older than time
itself, that directs one toward fulfilling their
true potential. However, Sanatana Dharma
does not outline only "one way" for a person
to find their purpose in the world. There
are countless directions one can take toward
fulfilling their dharma.

The very nature of Sanatana Dharma is
limitlessness, and its understanding of free-
will is a basic American ideal. One is free to
explore any way that they choose to create
their identity. This has led to a rather pliable
definition of the prototypical "American."
The average one from New York City is
vastly different than the average one from
Houston. Similarly, there is no strict defini-
tion of who a Hindu is. Sanatana Dharma
is a religion of incredible multiplicity in
practices and philosophies. There is no strict
dogma or ultimate set of rules. The defini-
tion of a Hindu is usually cited as "one who
believes and practices the teachings of the
Vedas," but there is no set requirement of
which beliefs of the *Vedas* must be adhered
to or accepted.

While there is a national character one
can identify with as an American, and there
are certain purposes one can identify with
as a Hindu, neither delineates one bind-
ing set of characteristics for the individual.
While we all have roles that we identify
with, our true identity is something beyond
them. To the Hindu, who we really are is
something greater, something universally



encompassing. Beneath our
self-judgments and person-
alities lies something more
permanent and universal. Thus,
one's true identity is bound-
less. This points to a core
unifying principle of Sanatana
Dharma—the essential oneness
of all things. "There is on Earth
no diversity... as a unity only
is it to be looked upon—this
indemonstrable, enduring

Being." (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.19–
20) While from a worldly standpoint, we all
come from different backgrounds, in essence
we are all one. We are all composed of the
same subatomic particles, held in existence
by the same energy. And at the deepest level,
there is no diversity—only smooth, peaceful
oneness. Within all of us is this proclivity
towards unity and balance. This is what
Hindus identify as God: the deepest essence
of our being, that which unites us all. This
is where sacredness is found in all things,
where Divinity lies in the magnificent and
the insignificant. Not only is every creature
seen as sacred—every moment is sacred,
each worth our full awareness, presence and
attention.

Here, in the profound spirituality of Hin-
duism, is a clear likeness of American cul-
ture: diversity in the context of unity. While
preserving a sense of national and personal
identity is important in both Hinduism and
"Americanism," there is an ultimate sense of
oneness across all people that both recognize.
By accepting this unifying Hindu belief of
oneness, we are accepting and adhering to
the basic American idea that all people are
equally free and deserve to fulfill their life's
purpose in whichever way they so choose.
In this way, American society becomes for
the Hindu a place where one is allowed to
discover their dharma in an environment of
unconditional acceptance.

SARIKA PERSAUD, of *Hindu Students Council*
in New York, submitted this for the *Hindu*
American Foundation's 2011 essay contest.

Advancing through Life's Four Stages

Applying the wisdom of ashrama dharma lends dignity and increasing purpose to every decade of life, but requires some new thinking

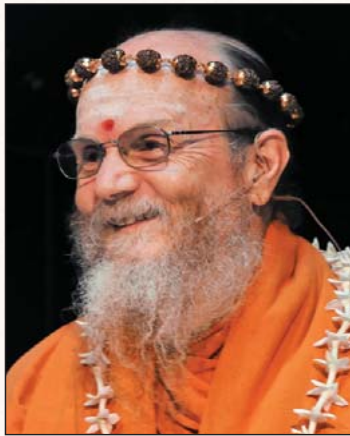
BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

RAJIV'S LONDON CLASSMATES ARE A RAUCOUS bunch of teenagers, flush with vigor, carefree and oblivious to future responsibilities. They see him as a stodgy fellow—smart, handsome, likeable—but missing out on the fun. “You’re only young once!” Jeremy chides, “Why not party with us?” Rajiv lives in a different world, having learned from his parents that life is measured in four stages, and that we reincarnate again and again—so we are young many, many times! He saves his energies for the important stuff, building his knowledge and character in preparation for the family stage, which he will enter in his twenties. Disinterested in fooling around, he hopes to win the hand of a cultured girl with whom to share this lifetime and bring children into the world. Rajiv even looks forward to his elder years when, having fulfilled his duties, he will withdraw into his soul nature, the eternal Rajiv, seeking God Realization as he lives out this earthly tenure. Rajiv is convinced that each phase of life has a natural purpose, and that each is more rewarding than the last. For now, he chooses to study as hard as he can, and play a little in between.

Rajiv's plan is founded on Hindu tradition which divides an individual's lifespan into four stages, or ashramas. This division, called ashrama dharma, is the natural expression and maturing of the body, mind and emotions through four progressive stages. It was developed millennia ago and detailed in scriptures known as the *Dharma Shastras*, highlighting the fact that our duties differ greatly as we progress from youth, to adulthood, senior years and old age. The *Maitri Upanishad* states: “Pursuit of the duties of the stage of life to which each one belongs—that, verily, is the rule! Others are like branches of a stem. With this, one tends upwards; otherwise, downwards.”

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, in *The Hindu View of Life*, summarizes: “The four stages—of brahmacharya, or the period of training, grihastha, or the period of work for the world as a householder, vanaprastha, or the period of retreat for the loosening of the social bonds, and sannyasa, or the period of renunciation and expectant awaiting of freedom—indicate that life is a pilgrimage to the eternal life through different stages.”

This paradigm is as important and precious now as it was a thousand years ago, shared by all Hindus, regardless of caste or gender. However, the ancient descriptions may not translate perfectly to our modern life. Society has changed



too much from how it was in Vedic times in India. For example, it would not work for all 50-year-olds to take up the life of a forest hermit, begging for their food. That would not be accepted by 21st century society. In some countries forest hermits would end up in jail as homeless vagrants or trespassers, hungry ones at that. A certain amount of reinterpretation is needed to allow contemporary Hindus to utilize the wisdom of this natural evolution of life. As a starting point, let's review the traditional descriptions.

The first stage, or ashrama, is brahmacharya—student life—and those in this ashrama are called brahmacharins, “those of divine comportment.” It was usually a period of twelve years, from age seven or eight to age 19 or 20. The student lived in his guru's home and learned scriptures, philosophy, science and logic. He was also taught how to conduct the Vedic fire ceremony. The brahmacharin was expected to follow a strict code of conduct, including celibacy, speaking the truth, gentleness in speech, physical austerities such as cold-water baths and eating sparingly at night. Serving the teacher and participating in the household duties were as much a part of his life as formal learning.

The second stage is householder life, grihastha dharma, and those in this ashrama are called grihasthins. After returning to his family home, the student was expected to marry and raise a family, earning well by righteous means to provide for his wife and children, support

his parents and give generously to charity. His religious duties included scriptural study and performing a daily Vedic fire ceremony in the home.

The third stage is vanaprastha—hermit life—and those in this ashrama are called vanaprasthins, “forest dwellers.” Generally around the age of 50 or 55, after the birth of grandchildren, the *Shastras* explain, the householder is expected to hand over the responsibilities of the family to his children and retire to the forest. He may take his wife if she is willing to share his life of austerities or leave her with his sons. He is to continue the daily fire ceremony, observe continence and devote himself to contemplation on God, all to prepare himself for life's final phase.

The fourth stage defined in scripture is sannyasa—renunciate life—and those in this ashrama are called sannyasins. When the forest recluse felt enough inner strength to totally renounce all possessions and lead the life of an itinerant monk, he would embrace sannyasa, after entrusting his wife to the care of the children. In this stage he was to move about constantly from place to place, begging his food and devoting himself to japa, meditation, worship of his Deity and contemplation of scriptures.

Looking next at how these ancient descriptions of the ashramas can be updated to better apply in contemporary society, my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, considered that in modern times each ashrama is a 24-year period, applying equally to men and women: brahmacharya being the first 24 years of life; grihastha extending from age 24 to 48; vanaprastha from age 48 to 72; and sannyasa from age 72 onward.

The goals of brahmacharya remain the same today, but some of the details may no longer apply, such as living in the home of one's teacher. Intense learning is still the main focus. Ideally, one acquires training in the profession he or she will follow in adult life. On the religious side, the basics of Hinduism are to be learned, along with memorizing mantras and conducting a puja in the home shrine, a practice that has largely replaced the Vedic fire ceremony in modern times. Students should be taught self-discipline, celibacy and other positive character qualities.

The descriptions of the grihastha ashrama also stand the test of time. The main focus is on marriage, bearing and raising children, serving society through one's career, earning income, taking care of elders and being charitable. Daily puja is conducted in the home, which ideally the entire family attends. Today the grihasthin is the primary teacher of Hinduism to his or her children, a duty the guru fulfilled in ancient times. This ashrama is a busy time of engagement

in the world while advancing one's family and profession.

It is in defining the vanaprastha stage that need arises to rethink the old definitions. Becoming a forest dweller at age 48 is not an option for most people. Instead, my guru described this as a natural time to help and guide the younger generations as an advisor and elder. Brahmacharins and grihasthins can actively seek out the advice of vanaprasthins and draw on and benefit from their years of experience. For example, many Hindus in this age group mentor youth through community programs, teach Hinduism to children, serve on the boards of trustees or committees of temples, or fulfill leadership roles in secular nonprofit organizations. This is a time of giving back to the community what one has learned, while slowly retiring from professional and public life.

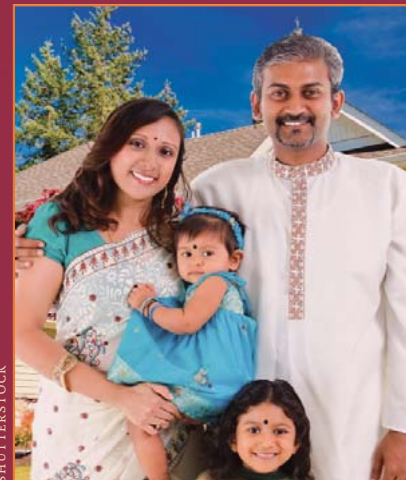
The parameters of the sannyasa ashrama have also widened. A small percentage of modern Hindus follow the model of taking up sannyasa after retirement, renouncing the world and wandering among the thousands of sadhus and sannyasins of India, many of whom took up the mendicant path in their 20s and 30s. This pattern of elders taking up sannyasa is okay for single people, widows and widowers, and it still works in parts of India where society honors and cares for such holy men and women. But in most areas of the world, it is neither accepted nor understood.

A number of Hindus turning age 72 have asked me what they should do differently in the years ahead. My advice is to simply intensify whatever religious practices they are already observing. If you perform a daily puja for 30 minutes, increase it to an hour. If you meditate daily for half an hour, increase it to an hour. If you go on pilgrimage for two weeks once a year, increase it to a month. Once these changes have become a firm habit, one would naturally be inclined to devote even more time to religious practices. After age 72, as the physical forces wane, is the time to turn within and withdraw from worldly involvement.

My guru gave this helpful description of the third and fourth ashramas for modern times: “It is during the latter stages of life that family devotees have the opportunity to intensify their sadhana and give back to society of their experience, their knowledge and their wisdom gained through the first two ashramas. The vanaprastha ashrama, age 48 to 72, is a very important stage of life, because that is the time when you can inspire excellence in the brahmacharya students and in the families, to see that their life goes along as it should. Later, the sannyasa ashrama, beginning at 72, is the time to enjoy and deepen whatever realizations you have had along the way.”



1. Student, age 12–24
Brahmacharya Ashrama



2. Householder, age 24–48
Grihastha Ashrama



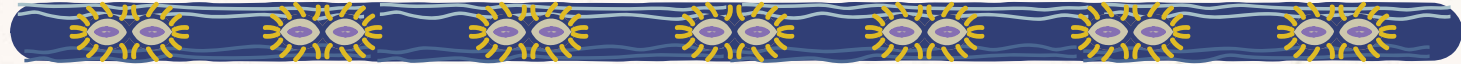
3. Senior Advisor, age 48–72
Vanaprastha Ashrama



4. Religious Devotion, age 72 & onward
Sannyasa Ashrama

Four dynamic stages:

- 1) As a student, gaining knowledge in math, science and other fields;
- 2) supporting and raising a family; 3) as a grandparent, semi-retired, devoting more time to religious pursuits and community programs while guiding one's offspring and their children; 4) as the physical forces wane, withdrawing more and more into religious practices.



LETTERS

Hindu Temples of the West

Your article, "Hindu Temples of the West Adjust, Adapt, Improvise" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2012) is very well written. It is an eye-opener for temple leaders and administrators and to help them develop better plans for the future.

HIRANYA GOWDA
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It was a wonderful surprise to receive the magazine last night! There is so much material covered. I am so very grateful to have been interviewed by you for this article on Hindu temples. The published article is extremely impressive!

RADHA KIRTANE
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Dealing with Conversion

I am a Hindu and a reader of your magazine. I pride myself in my liberal views and believe in respecting all faiths. We are a Hindu family but my sister converted to the Assemblies of God 25 years ago on the coercion of her husband. They and their four children are all very devout AOG members. I treat them with the same love and respect as any of my siblings and my parents. I don't know how long they have been trying to convert my parents and siblings, but recently my father was diagnosed with liver cancer and had a kidney removed. It was then that they placed a Bible in his hands, and now I hear through their son that they are trying to get my father to church meetings. I am very upset with this action as it is a blatant disrespect to both my parents and to our religion and faith. Please advise on what best I can do to bring further

understanding of the religion and to show them how they are being taken advantage of.

ANONYMOUS
KUALA LUMPUR, SELANGOR, MALAYSIA

Please consult Chapter 4 of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's book, How to Become a Hindu (himalayanacademy.com/resources/books/hbh/), which discusses this issue.

Predatory Proselytism

The article by Padma Kuppa, "Predatory Proselytism" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2012), describes the truth; and the truth must be spread. Copies of this article must be kept in every Hindu temple in India and abroad by supporters of truth for every one to read. I admire the writer's views supporting the truth.

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Ganesha Can Unify Us

As the oldest major religion in the world, we must continue leading the way in bringing the people of the world closer together. We must be more organized and united. Although we seem to have many divisions, Ganesha seems to be a common Deity for all of us. Maybe we can be more united through Him.

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Why No Temple Access?

Thank you for the interesting special edition on temple worship. One matter that is not dealt with, however, is the controversial issue of temple entry. As an ethnically

non-Indian Hindu, I am not allowed inside many of the most significant temples, such as Lingaraj in Bhubaneswar, Jagannath in Puri, Vishvanath in Varanasi, the inner sanctums of Meenakshi and Sundareswar in Madurai and many, many more. I have experienced downright hostile attitudes from the temple manager when wanting to visit the Panch Krosi Mandir in Varanasi. The problem may be that some of the temples are run by private trusts or families. But it is not fair that devotion is evaluated merely on the basis of skin color. It is racism. Indians, whether non-Hindus, atheists or meat-eaters, are allowed entry without questioning, but not sincere "whites." I would like your magazine to address this problem.

MIKAEL AKTOR
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Need for Nepali Translations

There is an urgent need for translation of the basic informational texts about Hinduism into Nepali. Nepal is being bombarded by Christianity. The Hindu Bhutanese community, now spread throughout the world, is having the same issues.

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Hindu Chaplains

I was most elated to read the article on the lady Hindu chaplain, Pratima Dharm (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2012). Among the countries that have Hindu chaplains in their armies you have not mentioned the Netherlands. My disciple, Pandit Komal Bissessar, from Surinam

in South America, serves as a Hindu chaplain in the army of the Netherlands.

MAHAMANDELASHWAR SWAMI VEDA BHARATI
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Welcome to Hinduism

I am fan of HINDUISM TODAY. I appreciate your efforts to give Hindus concise advice. Due to your efforts, more and more Westerners are moving to Sanatana Dharma. I want to embrace and say welcome to all new members.

PRABHAT CHAUHAN
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Visiting a Hindu Temple

I read with interest your article, "Visiting a Hindu Temple" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2012). Regarding the "Why Are Temples Needed?" segment, I want to add that while temples can help us experience Divinity through a murti, it is not the only way to experience Divinity. People who have faith in Advaita Vedanta, or pure nondualism, as exemplified by Shankaracharya, conceive Brahman to be the Impersonal God, the Absolute. Shankaracharya does not deny the existence of the Personal God, known as Ishwara, but declares Ishwara to be equally as unreal as the universe and the individuality of the soul. In truth, the only Reality is the Absolute, and

man is that Absolute. This Absolute can be realized through *shravana* (reading the scriptures), *nanana* (reflection on what one has read), and *nidhidhyasana* (meditation on what one has learned, so as to assimilate and internalize the scriptural knowledge). Too often, temple going becomes a mindless ritual, a means to socialize, a means to make business dealings or a means to find a life partner.

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A Gradual Change

Rev. Victor M. Parachin in his submission on "USA, Barely a Christian Nation" came to the conclusion that America has been undergoing a gradual spiritual change to embrace Eastern philosophies (Jul/Aug/Sept, 2011). He ended his letter by saying, "As more Americans discover the openness of the Eastern spiritual paths, it is a number which will continue to grow."

The main reason for the gradual shift to Eastern spiritual paths by Western people is not simply due to narrowness and divisive teachings of Abrahamic religions, it is because modern man is not satisfied with believing in something for the sake of belief. With the availability of a huge amount of advanced knowledge about the universe, modern man is far more intelligent and inquisitive

than those who lived in the medieval world. Today many followers of Abrahamic religions are asking questions of their validity. Some teachings, such as the origin of the universe, are now coming under scrutiny. "Belief for the sake of belief" is unlikely to survive long. It will be replaced by the quest for the truth. The most important point of Rev. Parachin's submission is the use of the word *embrace*, indicating that the silent spiritual change taking place in the USA is a natural process rather than one induced by preaching, propaganda and proselytizing. It is from within. It is a call that leads man to seek the truth of why things are what they are, rather than have a belief that is naturally an impediment to the advancement of knowledge and unravelling the mysteries of the universe.

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or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator.



We Reconnected with Our Core Beliefs

How you can help spread Hinduism's treasures

MY WIFE AND I DO SIMILAR WORK," explains Dr. Jagdish Ragade of Portland, Oregon, USA. "My specialty is Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychiatry while Namrata is an advisor and consultant to other doctors. Basically, our jobs are to find solutions and help others do the same."

"A year ago, when we found HINDUISM TODAY, immediately our lives were enhanced. At work, I find myself banking more confidently on the inner—in ways I would hardly have dared do previously. I can go for solutions on a bigger scale. And it generally works out."

"HINDUISM TODAY helped us to reconnect with our core beliefs," Namrata adds. "Once your understanding and faith deepen, you can really help others. People around you begin to understand and have faith, too. This has proved true in our work and at home also, where the inspiration of one becomes that of the others. Our daughters Anusha, 9, and Shreya, 6, appreciate our new

shrine room as much as we do. 'It feels so good in there,' they say. I am amazed at how much they understand. We have become enthusiastic vegetarians and, once a month, all four of us go out into the street with our pots and pans and feed the homeless people."

Jagdish and Namrata have donated generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "We like to think that our gifts will help the magazine to continue providing those liberating perspectives that are inspiring us and our children," Jagdish explains. "We imagine a future where HINDUISM TODAY is financially strong and able to share Hinduism's spiritual treasures with a great many people. And, as inspired people tend to inspire others, the effect should be a wonder to behold. We consider contributing to the magazine's future a most worthy cause."

If you share the Ragade's vision and their enthusiasm for spirituality, please donate—now or in your estate plan—to



Coming together: We are more confident now, knowing we can answer the children's questions.

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QUOTES & QUIPS

“The world is the great gymnasium where we come to make ourselves strong.”

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902)

Humanity—so colorful in its own eyes!—is seen by a master to be divided into only two classes: ignorant men who are not seeking God, and wise men who are. **Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri** (1855–1936), *guru of Paramahansa Yogananda*

There is no greater Truth than the Guru, no greater penance than the Guru, no knowledge greater than the Guru—therefore to that Guru I ever pay my homage. *Guru Gita 77*

In death the many become one; in life the one becomes many. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941)

He is the inner Self of all, hidden like a little flame in the heart. Only by the stilled

mind can He be known. Those who realize Him become immortal. He has thousands of heads, thousands of eyes, thousands of feet; He surrounds the cosmos on every side. This infinite being is ever present in the hearts of all. He has become the cosmos. He is what was, and what will be. Yet He is unchanging, the Lord of immortality. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad 3.13–15*

The arrogance of being knowledgeable is more dangerous than having no knowledge at all. **Sri Rameshbhai Oza**, *katha performer and our Hindu of the Year 2006*

In the beginning, love arose, which was the primal germ cell of the mind. The seers, searching in their hearts with wisdom, discovered the connection of Being in

Nonbeing. *Rig Veda 10.129.4*

The ways are two: love and want of love. That is all. **Mencius** (372–289 bce), *Chinese philosopher*

The thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen. **Frank Lloyd Wright** (1967–1959), *architect*

It is the nature of desire never to be fulfilled, but he who utterly gives it up is eternally fulfilled at that very moment. *Tirukural 370*

The statement below is true. The statement above is false.

Many good sayings are to be found in holy

books, but merely reading them will not make one religious. One must practice the virtues taught in such books in order to acquire love of God. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

There is a proverb in our language: ‘If I want to be a hunter, I’ll hunt the rhinoceros; if I want to be a robber, I’ll rob the king’s treasury.’ What is the use of robbing beggars or hunting ants? So if you want to love, love God. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

Teacher: “If you had Rs. 50 and you asked your father for another Rs. 50, how much would you have?” **Naseem:** “Rs. 50.” **Teacher:** “You don’t know arithmetic.” **Naseem:** “You don’t know my father.”

Whatever good you wish to do, do it now and here. Do not wait for the tomorrow. A day will come whose tomorrow we shall not see. **Dada J.P. Vaswani**, *head of Sadhu Vaswani Mission and our Hindu of the Year 2002*

The tragedy of human history is that there is decreasing happiness in the midst of increasing comforts. **Swami Chinamayananda**, (1916–1993)

The major way a family person makes



spiritual progress is by fulfilling all duties—duties to spouse, duties to children, duties to parents, duties to community. When we fulfill our duties as best we can, we make spiritual progress. We don’t have to go anywhere else. We don’t have to give up our duties and spend time in a cave. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**

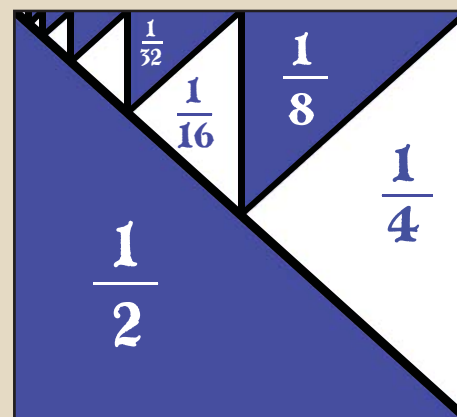
Hinduism is such a joyous religion, freed of all the mental encumbrances that are prevalent in the various Western faiths. It is freed of the notion of a vengeful God. It is freed of the notion of eternal suffering. It is freed from the notion of original sin. It is freed from the notion of a single spiritual path, a One Way. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001)

DID YOU KNOW?

The Indian Roots of Calculus

A LITTLE-KNOWN SCHOOL OF scholars in southwest India discovered one of the founding principles of modern mathematics hundreds of years before Newton, according to new research published by the University of Manchester in England. The article, by mathematician George Gheverghese Joseph, says the Kerala school identified the infinite series—a basic component of calculus—in about 1350. That discovery is currently attributed to Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibnitz at the end of the seventeenth century. Joseph’s team also discovered that the Kerala school used infinite series to calculate *pi* correctly to 9, 10 and later 17 decimal places. There is strong evidence that the Indians passed on their discovery of infinite series to mathematically

knowledgeable Jesuit missionaries who visited India during the fifteenth century. That knowledge, they say, may have eventually been passed on to Newton himself. Joseph made the discoveries while researching for his book *The Crest of the Peacock: The Non-European Roots of Mathematics* (Princeton University Press). He writes: “The beginnings of modern mathematics are usually seen as European achievements, but the discoveries in medieval India between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries have been ignored or forgotten. The brilliance of Newton’s work stands undiminished. But other names from the Kerala school, notably Madhava and Nilakantha, should stand shoulder to shoulder with him, as they discovered the other great component of calculus—infinite series.”



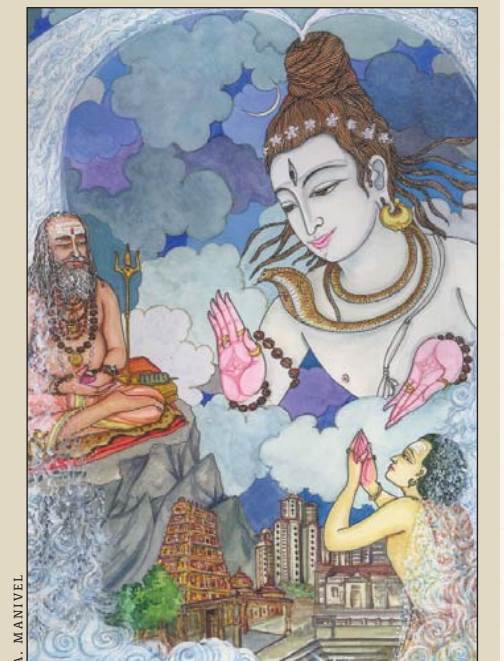
Infinite series: In this visual example, we have a 1 by 1 square, with an area of 1. We can approximate the area by adding together a “series” of 1/2 of the square plus 1/4 plus 1/8th and so on. The sum will come closer and closer to 1, but never reach it. The “infinite series” method of calculus, where an infinite number of fractions is summed, gives the “limit” and correct answer of exactly 1.

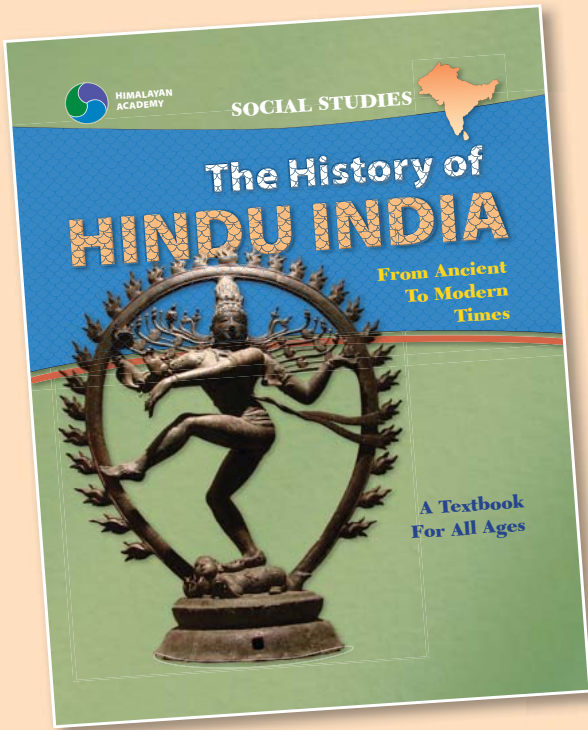
BASICS OF HINDUISM

Structure of the Universe

THERE ARE THREE WORLDS OF existence: the physical, subtle and causal, termed Bhuloka, Antarloka and Sivaloka. The physical plane, or Bhuloka, is the world of gross or material substance in which phenomena are perceived by the five senses. It is the most limited of worlds, the least permanent and the most subject to change. The material world is where we have our experiences, manufacture karma and fulfill the desires and duties of life in a physical body. It is in the Bhuloka that consciousness is limited, that awareness of the other two worlds is not always remembered. The subtle plane, or Antarloka, is the mental-emotional sphere that we function in through thought and feeling and reside

in fully during sleep and after death. It is the astral world that exists within the physical plane. The astral plane is for the most part exactly duplicated in the physical plane, though it is of a more intense rate of vibration. The causal plane, or Sivaloka, pulsates at the core of being, deep within the subtle plane. It is the superconscious world where the Gods and highly evolved souls live and can be accessed through yoga and temple worship. The causal plane is the world of light and blessedness, the highest of heavenly regions, extolled in the scriptures of all faiths. It is the foundation of existence, the source of visions, the point of conception, the apex of creation, abode of Lord Siva Himself. The Sivaloka is the natural refuge of all souls.





Finally, a Fair & Accurate Presentation of Hindu History for Children

A 128-page sixth-grade social studies course from the editors of HINDUISM TODAY

HINDUISM TODAY's Hindu history book is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge

While no book can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that this work compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation, USA

This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus. Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending it as review material for my college students.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA

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FROM THE AGAMAS

How Do We Know What We Know?

True knowledge comes only from the power of pure consciousness

The following is a lucid translation of passages from the Paushkara Agama, chapter 9, verses 3 to 18, entitled "On the Means of Valid and True Knowledge." Responding to a question from the sages, Lord Siva addresses the philosophical issue of the means of bona fide knowledge, a topic of discussion in all schools of Hindu thought.

SAGES: O LORD, WE NOW DESIRE TO LISTEN TO YOUR INSTRUCTIONS and expositions on the means of valid knowledge, without which our knowledge of things would be uncertain. Therefore, O Lord Ishana, kindly be favorably disposed to speak on *pramanas*, the means of acquiring valid knowledge.

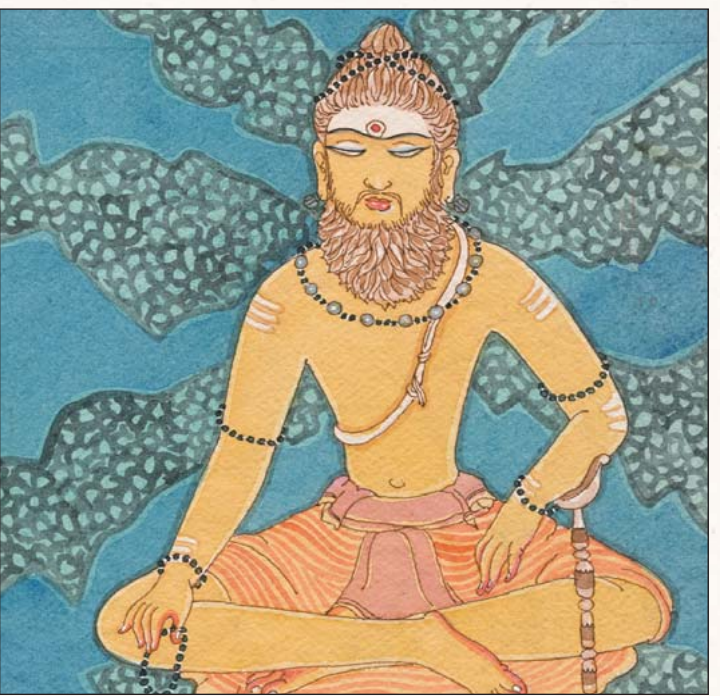
Lord Siva: Twice-born sages, there are four common means of valid knowledge: perception (*pratyaksha*), inference (*anumana*), verbal testimony (*shabda*) and presumption (*arthapatti*). But the power of consciousness itself (*chit-shakti*), free from doubt and other defects, is said to be the impeccable means of valid knowledge.

The cognition that is unable to distinguish between two similar things, for lack of sufficient differentiating information, is known as doubt (for example, a thin curved object could be perceived as a snake or a rope, with closer inspection required to decide). Error is the "otherwise-than-what-it-is cognition" (*anyatha jnana*), based on the perception of a nature or quality that does not actually belong to the form cognized. In this *Agama*, memory (*smriti*) is said to be the cognition of objects that have been experienced previously (and which may cloud one's present judgment because of differing circumstances).

Chit-shakti, free from these three defects, is the infallible means of pramana (valid knowledge). Chit-shakti is nothing but the power of consciousness directed to objects. The knower, i.e. the Atman or Self, is of the nature of pure consciousness, not of the nature of being directed toward objects. The power of consciousness acquires valid knowledge when it is directed toward other objects, e.g., a pot.

To be infallible, this definition of valid knowledge, should be free from three defects: 1) under-pervasion (*nuna vyapti*, meaning a definition which is only partially accurate) does not occur because the definition, beyond doubt, pervades the means of knowledge, such as perception and others; 2) over-pervasion (*ati vyapti*, meaning a definition which is insufficiently specific) does not apply to different entities, like the objects of knowledge; 3) otherwise under-pervasion (*anyatha avyapti*, meaning a definition which is obviously impossible) also does not occur. The definition of the means of valid knowledge has, therefore, been well established.

Some say the means of valid knowledge is the instrument of knowledge (such as the senses or the intellect). Why cannot such a view be accepted? The instrument of knowledge cannot be the means of valid knowledge, because the state of being a means or a medium of valid knowledge would apply even to the intellect (buddhi), a lamp, sense of sight and others. This is not acceptable, because that which is a means of valid knowledge cannot also be a knowable thing. It has already been proven that something that is knowable cannot be the means of acquiring valid knowledge. That which is a knowable cannot be a means of knowing, because a means is that by which a knowable is known.



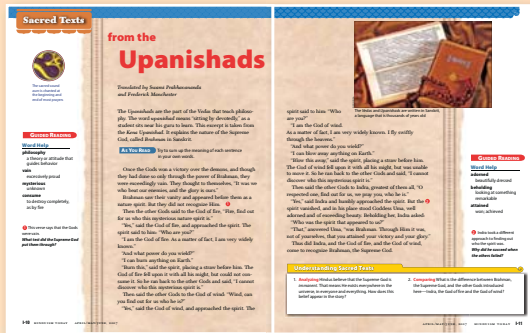
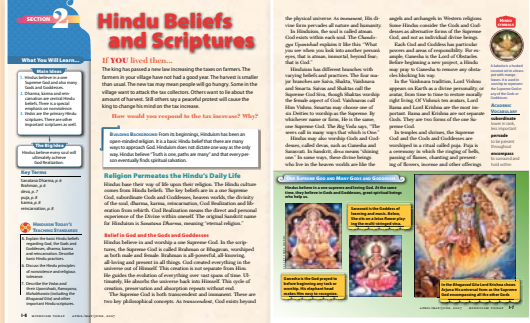
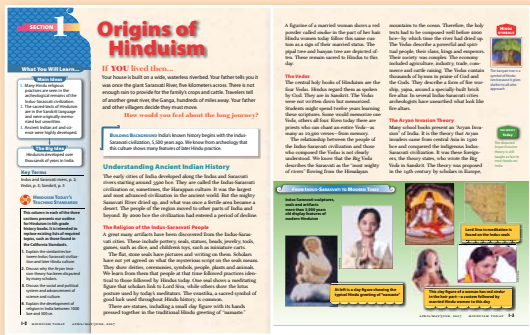
Introspection required: *The meditator faces within himself the complex challenge of determining what constitutes real knowledge*

There is a common usage in the world, "I see through my eyes." This is due to the help rendered by the eyes (to chit-shakti). But the knowledge gained is only acquired through the power of consciousness using the eyes. The eyes themselves do not convey the knowledge to the Self.

The sense of sight is not the means of the hearing of sound. The sense of hearing is not the means of the cognition of color or form. Consciousness is always the cognizer everywhere. Therefore, that alone is considered to be the means of knowledge. By the manifestation of chit-shakti, there is the cognition of all this. By the non-manifestation of chit-shakti, nothing is known.

But why cannot intellect (buddhi tattva), which is the ultimate cause of all cognition, be accepted as a means of knowledge? Buddhi cannot be so. Buddhi cannot be a means of knowledge, because, being not different from the products of prakriti (tattva), it is insentient, like the sense of sight and others. Moreover, buddhi is characterized by various states, such as happiness and sorrow. Therefore, the state of invariably being a means of knowledge is not accorded to buddhi.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adi Saiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas, Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*.

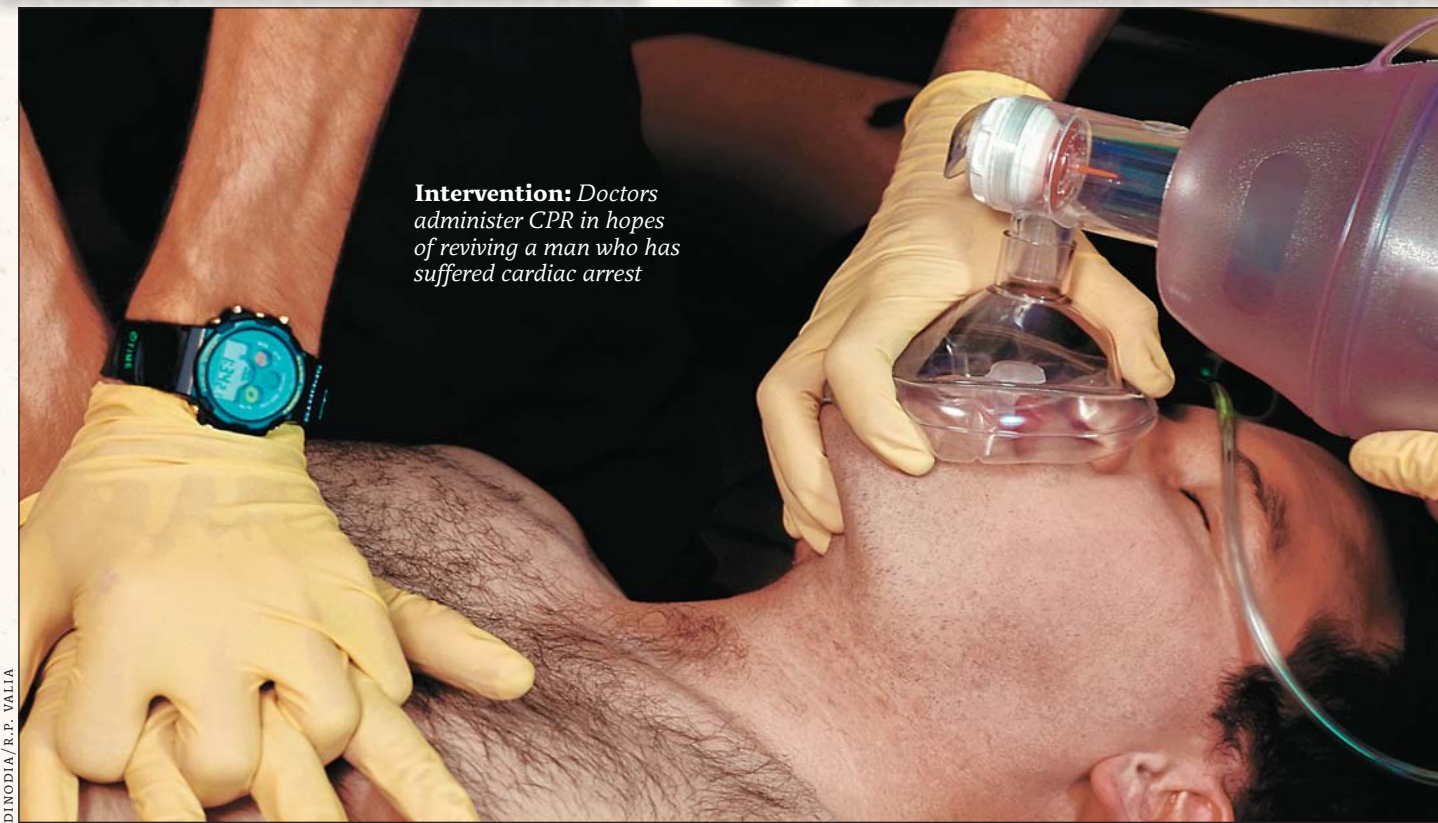


Medical Ethics

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT PART I



Ayurveda: In ancient days, an Indian physician blends herbs and other ingredients to create natural medicines, as his apprentice reads the palm leaf formulae. After 5,000 years, this traditional, holistic system of health and healing still thrives.



Intervention: Doctors administer CPR in hopes of reviving a man who has suffered cardiac arrest

How Hindu Dharma Addresses 25 Controversial Medical Issues Frequently Encountered by Physicians

HINDU MEDICINE, KNOWN AS AYURVEDA, OR THE "SCIENCE of life," has a highly developed system of practical ethics derived from the Hindu principles of nonharmfulness, the sanctity of all life, the existence of the soul separate from the body and a willingness to accept life's circumstances as defined by one's karma and dharma.

In 1999, HINDUISM TODAY was approached by the Texas Medical Association to help them revise and expand a book on medical issues called *Faith of Our Patients*. When it was first published in 1978, the book dealt with the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish views of 14 "problem areas" most frequently encountered by physicians, including autopsy, abortion, artificial insemination, prolongation of life and organ transplants. The association had recently expanded its list and sought to include the views of Hinduism and Buddhism to accommodate increased religious diversity among their patients.

Responding to their request, HINDUISM TODAY enlisted the help of Swami Bua of New York; Swami Satchidananda of the Integral Yoga Institute; Swami Ranganathananda, president of the Ramakrishna Mission; Swami Chidananda Saraswati (Muniji); Swami Omkar-ananda; Swami Pragyand; Swami Tejomayananda of Chinmaya Mission; Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, and his successor, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. We also consulted with Dr. Virendra Sodhi, a gifted ayurvedic and allopathic doctor in Washington, and Cromwell Crawford of the University of Hawaii, an Indian-born specialist in Hindu medical ethics. The

assembled responses below represent the broad consensus of this group, with occasional differing opinions, though the precise wording has been crafted by HINDUISM TODAY.

Fortunately, as pointed out by Professor Crawford, the ancient codifiers of ayurveda, Sushruta and Charaka, carefully considered and documented the ethics of their profession and its medical procedures. They did so within the context of a Hindu view of man, which, as Swami Ranganathananda put it, "is that his essential, real nature is the atman or Self, which is immortal, self-luminous, the source of all power, joy and glory. Everything that helps in the manifestation of the divinity of the soul is beneficial and moral, and everything that obstructs this inner unfoldment is harmful and immoral."

With this over-arching principle in mind, it was the aim of the ayurvedic physician in ancient India (and remains so today) to preserve the well-being of the community through maintaining health and removing the threats to life of humans and non-humans. The ancient healers held that pathogenesis, the development of disease, is not caused randomly or simplistically by external agents through infection or injury. Rather, the development of any disease is also an expression of karma: the results of one's past actions. It is hoped that this compilation of Hindu medical ethics will provide a spiritual view of the medical concerns faced by all Hindus, one that will balance the prevailing humanistic view by presenting a traditional Hindu perspective from which to evaluate the important matters of healing, life, death and the beyond.

Matters of Birth

Hindus consider children a gift from God. Conception, development and birth of a child are sacred events, honored by a ceremony, or samskara, marking these rites of passage. Today's medical technology has developed many means for conceiving children. Hindus have a general unwillingness to interfere with nature and a special aversion to abortion, based on the belief in reincarnation and the sanctity of marriage.

Conception

From the Hindu point of view, conception connects a soul from the next world to this world, and the state of mind at the moment of conception—including the purity and spiritual intent of both partners—is a major factor in determining who is born into the family. Prospective parents often offer prayers at temples, perform spiritual disciplines and visit saints for their advice and blessings in their effort to conceive a worthy child. In Western thinking, no emphasis is placed on the state of mind of the parents at conception, and there is little understanding of the ways parents can affect the “quality” of the souls born to them.

Birth Control

While revering conception as a divine act, Hindus have little hesitation to practice birth control, and there are remedies specified in ayurveda both for facilitating and preventing conception. As Swami Bua reminded, restraint and moderation are important: “Hindu scriptures explain how to beget a child. They specify the days, time and methods. That means they would have known also how not to beget a child! But willful control of conception by external means was not advocated. The preferred control was through restraint, as wasting of life seeds was considered unhealthy and unethical. Birth control now is highlighted as a prime duty of every citizen to society and nation. But one fears that these open discussions are licensing society towards promiscuity, since weak minds take the shortest route to pleasures, however fleeting they may be, unmindful of consequences.”

Sterility Testing

While ostensibly harmless, sterility tests can cause serious social and emotional difficulty if one is deemed sterile, including inability to find a spouse, cancellation of proposals and the ruin of marriages once it is known who is to blame for the lack of children. “This should not be resorted to as a routine test,” cautioned Swami Bua. “Doubting the manliness of a man and femininity of a woman is degrading them. What will happen to those who fail the test? Will anybody come forward to marry them? Even though procreation is the main aim of a marriage, it is not the only aim. After a reasonable time following the marriage, if there has been no conception, and if a mature couple desire to get tested with a view to take corrective action, it may be done.” Dr. Sodhi pointed out that while ayurveda has no tests for sterility, the likelihood of children is one of the major considerations when evaluating a couple's astrology prior to marriage.

Artificial Insemination

Fertilization of the egg by mechanical introduction of sperm is universally acceptable when the sperm is provided by the woman's husband. But questions arise with donated sperm from another man. Because conception creates a psychic bond between a man and a woman, even if they don't meet physically, fertilization in this manner may have a similar karma as adultery. “In Sanatana Dharma initiation into married life is sanctified by sacred sacramental rites,”

Swami Tejomayananda observed. “The offspring of such a union is blessed and protected by the holy mantras and rites. If there is some defect or obstruction in either partner, artificial insemination may be resorted to, but with the husband's sperm only. If the procedure succeeds, it may be taken as the will of the Lord for that couple. Use of seeds from the sperm banks or from any living person other than the husband is not proper. It will amount to bearing a child outside holy wedlock.” However, as Professor Crawford pointed out, the *Manu Dharma Shastra* did allow a woman to conceive a child by another man, usually her husband's brother. Swami Bua referenced this tradition also: “The *Rig Veda* and *Atharva Veda* prescribe the procedure called *niyoga* to enable a childless widow or the wife of an impotent man to raise progeny with his consent. But even with this, the attitude of an average Hindu woman considers the one who has given her a child as her respectful husband.” Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami observed that one has to consider the likely negative impact of artificial insemination on a marriage. The husband would not be the child's true father, resulting in a weak relationship with the child and even with the wife who required another man to conceive.

In Vitro Fertilization

Even with present-day technology, the creation of “test-tube babies”—the fertilization of the egg outside the womb and its subsequent placement in the womb—is expensive and unreliable. As with artificial insemination, it is acceptable if the egg and sperm are from the husband and wife. Like other medical advances, *in vitro* fertilization introduces unknown factors that may bring unintended consequences, not necessarily positive or conducive to spiritual progress, which is life's real purpose. Hindus regard the natural way of things as endowed with God's infinite intelligence and often ask, “Are humans wise enough to tinker with the cosmic order of life?”

Abortion

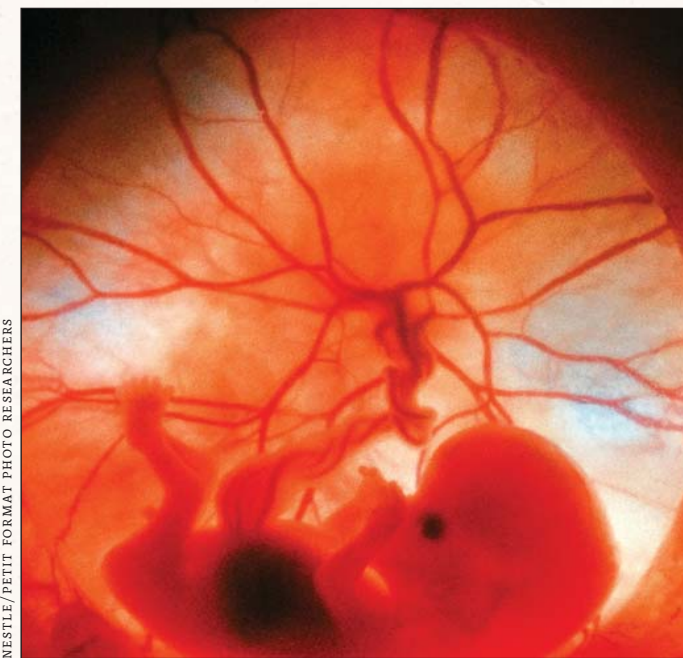
Hindu scripture and tradition clearly prohibit abortion, except to save the life of the mother. It is considered an act against *rita* (universal order) and *ahimsa* (noninjury). In the words of Swami Omkar-ananda, “Imagine, through millions of abortions around the world, day in and day out, how many wonderful scientific and spiritual geniuses—doctors, men of excellence of every kind, sages, saints, benefactors of mankind, builders of a better culture and civilization—are destroyed even before they can take a breath of fresh air here on Earth!” Hindu ethics also do not justify aborting a fetus because of actual or potential deformity or mental retardation, for each birth, normal or not, is revered as having a divine purpose to be understood, not manipulated. Nevertheless, abortion is performed today by Hindus in India and elsewhere—particularly selective termination of female fetuses following ultrasound examination. Professor Crawford called that practice “a perverted use of modern science, a scarcely concealed form of female infanticide.” Sivaya Subramuniyaswami summarized in sutra 34 of *Living with Siva*, “Followers know abortion is, by Vedic injunction, a sinful act against dharma fraught with karmic repercussions. Scripture only allows it to prevent the mother's death, for it is a greater sin for a child to kill the mother.” “In the modern context,” Swami Tejomayananda advised, “attention must be focused on the prevention of pregnancy by educating and creating awareness in the parents.” Abortion, should it occur, creates a karma to be faced in the future, but is not regarded as an unforgivable “sin.” A penance could mitigate the karma, such as adopting a baby who might otherwise have been aborted if no home was provided.

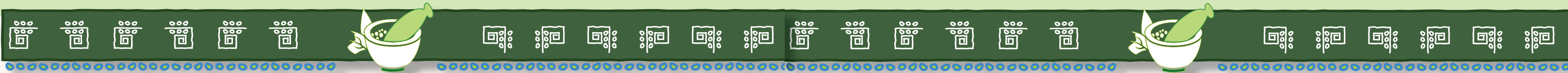
Selective Termination of Multiple Fetuses

Multiple births are rare, except when a couple is undergoing fertility treatments, which may result in multiple fetuses, creating a



From conception to birth: (clockwise from top) A woman undergoes an ultrasound exam; human embryo with the umbilical cord connecting to the placenta; a human zygote at eight-cell stage





Sustaining life: (left to right) Surgeons operate on a patient; a Hindu prays for Lord Siva's grace to help her heal

potentially dangerous condition for the mother. Under the principle that abortion is allowed to save the mother's life, Dr. Sodhi offered that selective abortion is acceptable when a specific pregnancy poses such a threat. It is an unfortunate choice to have to make, and hopefully future technology will reliably produce only one fetus.

Pain-Relief Drugs for Newborns

Pain relief for children should be carefully chosen to not form, or lay the seeds for, a future addiction. Swami Bua counseled, "Some people think that the pains of a newborn baby are the consequences of its previous birth and that we should allow the baby to experience and sustain them so that remnants of the previous birth are left behind. But we should also realize that God has brought this baby to our hands expecting us to comfort it and protect it and help it to grow as a healthy and worthy human being. It is the duty of the parents and the people nearby to do whatever is possible to relieve the baby of any pain." "According to *ayurveda*," Dr. Sodhi added, "the baby has as sensitive a nervous system as an adult, just not as developed. So pain medicine is okay, if necessary. Morphine was used for thousands of years in the form of opium, applied on the baby's skin for pain relief."

Circumcision

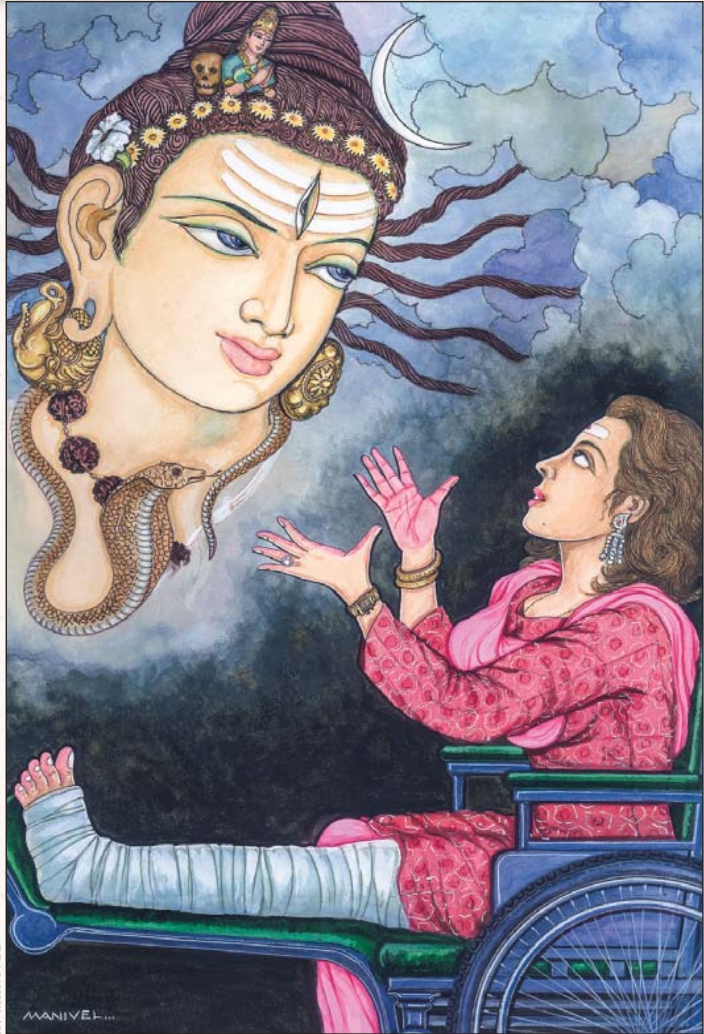
Hindus consider the practice of circumcision for males unnecessary and do not practice it. Doctors should be alerted to Hindu views on this often-standard procedure. A circumcised Hindu boy could face ridicule and discrimination. Rarely, the procedure is required as a medical necessity for an adult, but kept secret.

Other Medical Concerns

Our reflections move on to ethical considerations regarding organ transplants, blood transfusions, faith healing and dietary laws.

Organ Transplants

Hindus generally believe that the recipient of a major organ, such as the heart, lung, liver or kidney, takes on some of the karmas of the donor. Evidence of this can be found in documented cases where the organ recipients took on the interests, emotions, food preferences, etc., of the donor, especially after a heart transplant. Transplants apparently create psychic connections with the donor, whether living or dead. Also, the fact that part of a deceased donor's physical body still "lives" may interfere with his reincarnation pattern, keeping him close to the physical plane and to the recipient. Swami Tejomananda offered, "The Hindu way of life is to accept the inevitable, to go through the karma, exhaust it and be free to take on new life to evolve further spiritually." Swami Bua voiced a different view: "Let us encourage and support the scientists and medical men and women who are working with pure intentions towards a painless, diseaseless society. We should only guard against unscrupulous traders in human organs." Swami Chidanand Saraswati opined that it is "important to donate organs" in the Hindu spirit of giving and sacrifice. Dr. Sodhi offered: "Some transplants, such as the cornea, are okay, but not the heart, which is the seat of the soul according to *ayurveda*. If the quality of life is going to be very good after the transplant, I might not have a problem, but if they have to be on harsh drugs all the time, maybe transplanting is not the best idea." Swami Satchidananda chided, "What are we doing by transplanting organs?" By replacing



organs in a body that is clearly dying, we are not allowing the soul to fulfill its karma in this life by dying at the proper time and getting a new body. The trend of science seems to want to keep the soul indefinitely in the same old body with repaired parts. This is not the correct thing to do."

Blood Donations/Transfusions

"In early times there were some hesitations, on the basis of caste and religion, for blood transfusion," observed Swami Bua; "but now, considering the necessity of blood transfusion during any surgery, people are accepting it." Blood transfusions differ from organ donations in that the recipient's body soon completely replaces the foreign blood.

Religious or Faith Healings

Hindus make use of all means of healing, be they medical, astrological or metaphysical. The latter includes mantras and yoga, seeking the guidance of a guru and performing temple ceremonies for the direct blessing and intervention of God, Gods and devas. "A Hindu has an ardent faith in the powers of prayers and in the Supreme God," said Swami Bua, "The patient will go to the doctor—*ayurvedic* or *allopathic*—all the while praying to God for recovery." Swami Pragyanand noted, "Healing with mantras was very popular in ancient times. Even now it is being practiced for various ailments." Swami Tejomananda added, "In healing by prayers, Divine Grace comes in.

If the karma is nearing exhaustion, or it is only a weak karma, or the healing will help the person in his spiritual pursuit, or if the Higher Power has some work to be done through the person, then a cure may be effected." Dr. Sodhi added, "In *ayurveda*, specific pujas, or ceremonies to the Gods, are sometimes prescribed for patients."

Dietary Ethics

Vegetarianism is a central aspect of Hinduism, and of even broader import is the *ayurvedic* wisdom that health is directly dependent upon diet. A Hindu vegetarian who is hospitalized will need to coordinate with care-givers to be served proper food unless he can have family or friends bring his meals. The *ayurvedic* prerogative is: when healthy, eat a diet that prevents disease and enhances spiritual life. When ill, a drastic change in diet may be the best cure, as seen in the improvement of heart patients put on a vegetarian diet. "The scriptures recognize that food has a great influence on the mind," shared Swami Tejomananda, "'When food is pure, mind is pure,' state the *Upanishads*. Mothers prepare food with love in the heart for the children. These positive vibrations are absorbed, and the persons who partake of the food imbibe them. Eating is an act of worship."

End-of-Life Issues

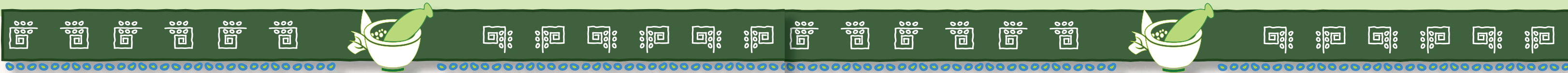
Hindus regard death as a most exalted human experience, the migration of the soul from one dimension of consciousness to another, a transition we have all experienced many times. Death is not to be feared, neither unnecessarily accelerated nor relentlessly delayed. In considering the following end-of-life issues, the Hindu seeks to preserve the natural timing of death, while humanely comforting and being present for the patient in a spiritual environment.

Assisted Suicide

Hindu philosophy does not support assisted suicide, which is deliberately causing the death of a patient at the patient's own request by drugs, overdose of painkillers or other lethal means. In extreme circumstances of unbearable agony where others turn to euthanasia or mercy killing, Hindus know the sufferer may refuse food and water.

Suicide

Hindus believe that life is sacred—God's grace—and therefore it is not ours to end. Suicide only postpones and intensifies the karma one seeks escape from, requiring several lives to return to the evolutionary point that existed at the moment of suicide; thus it is a spiritual step backwards. In cases of terminal illness, under strict community regulation, tradition does allow *prayopavesha*, self-willed religious death by fasting. Sivaya Subramuniyaswami taught, "The Vedic rishis gave the anguished embodied soul a way to systematically, nobly and acceptably, even to loved ones, release itself from embodiment through fasting. The person making such a decision declares it publicly, which allows for community regulation and distinguishes the act from suicide committed privately in traumatic emotional states of anguish and despair. Ancient lawgivers cited various stipulations for *prayopavesha*: inability to perform normal bodily purification, death appears imminent, or the condition is so bad that life's pleasures are nil. The gradual nature of *prayopavesha* is the key factor in distinguishing it from sudden suicide, for it allows time for the individual to settle all differences with others, to ponder life and draw close to God." It also gives the person time to reflect and reconsider his decision.



Prolongation of Life

Ayurveda classifies disease as either *sadhya*, those that can be effectively treated and cured, or *asadhya*, those that cannot. It further classifies untreatable diseases as those which can be managed for an acceptable quality of life, such as diabetes, and those which cannot, such as terminal cancer. If treatment cannot provide the patient a quality life, then it is considered better to give no treatment beyond palliative measures.

The Right to Die

It is the law in many parts of America that a hospital must do everything it can to keep a patient alive as long as possible, no matter what his state of consciousness, or the prognosis for a useful existence. If the patient's financial resources are exhausted, then the state must pay. To avoid being kept alive against his own wishes, he must make a "living will" in advance, to specify under what conditions he declines further treatment, and assign a person to make that decision for him if he cannot. A living will can preserve the resources of a family, avoiding costly and ineffective heroic treatment. Hindus accept the natural timing of life and of death, and do not strain to gain a few months of struggle-filled life at great effort and expense.

Do-Not-Resuscitate Orders

Part of a living will deals with "Do-not-resuscitate" orders. These instructions tell the doctors when they should not use cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or other measures to revive a person if his heart or breathing has stopped. Again, the decision centers around the likely quality of a life so revived. A drowning or heart-attack victim may, after resuscitation, go on to a full recovery. But for terminally ill patients, resuscitation may only delay the inevitable, prolong the suffering and interfere with the natural timing of death. Sivaya Subramuniyaswami counseled, "To make heroic medical attempts that interfere with the process of the patient's departure is a grave responsibility, similar to not letting a traveler board a plane flight he has a reservation for, to keep him stranded in the airport with a profusion of tears and useless conversation. To prolong life in the debilitated physical body past the point that the natural will of the person has sustained is to incarcerate, to jail, to place that person in prison. The prison is the hospital. The guards are the life-support machines and the tranquilizing drugs."

Removal of Life Support

A critical and closely related issue any living will should address is the removal of life support. Modern machines can keep patients alive when they are unable to breathe or take nourishment, and when organs cease to function, including the heart. Life-support patients may be in near-normal consciousness, semi-conscious, comatose or brain dead, with no brain wave activity at all. Even common kidney dialysis machines and ventilators qualify as life support, for if turned off patients would die. A much discussed issue is whether turning off a life support machine is killing the patient or letting him die. The issue is further complicated by rapidly advancing technology whereby ever more seriously ill or injured patients can be kept alive.

In Dr. Sodhi's opinion, removal of life support would be justified in a case where there is no brain-wave activity, for "according to ayurveda, that person is dead. Sustaining his condition is more like the torture of the soul, and ayurveda prohibits it." While ancient Hindu medicine did not anticipate many of the abilities of today's complex machines, it did discuss the issue of nourishment, which is a part of any life-support system. Hindu scripture allows for the termination of food and water at the request of a terminally ill patient who chooses a self-willed death by fasting. The patient can specify in advance in his living will under what conditions nourishment, hydration or other

life support should be withheld. Knowing his intentions would alleviate the karmic burden of the doctors and family. The ideal, as Sivaya Subramuniyaswami counseled his devotees, is to not be put on a life support machine in the first place when there is little chance of recovery.

Preparation for Death

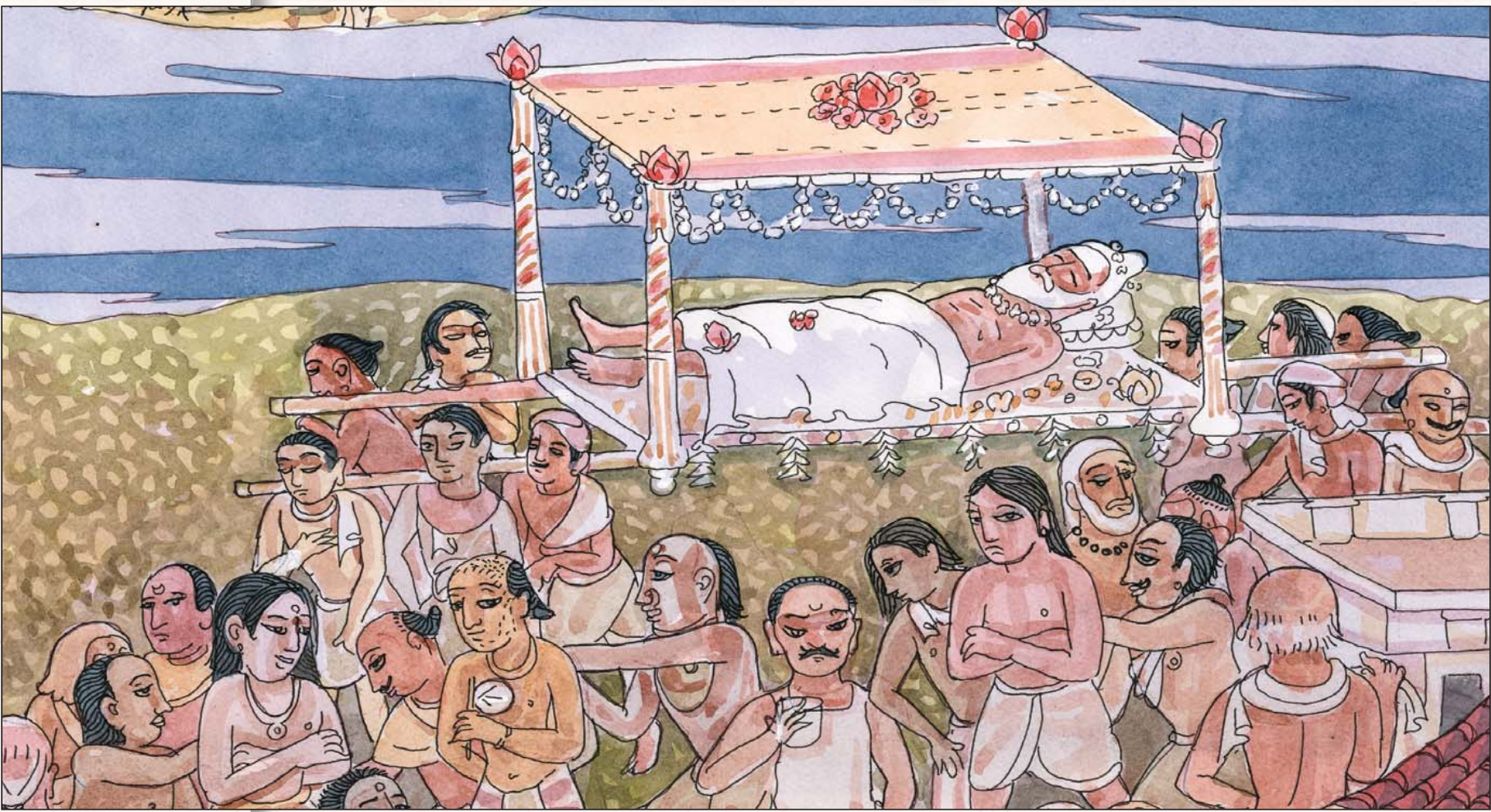
"With our strong conviction that all our actions in the present life will be the cause for the effects in our future life," noted Swami Bua, "a wise Hindu facing death goes into introspection of all his deeds during the present life and sincerely tries to make amends for the wrong deeds. Wherever it is beyond correction, he repents and wholeheartedly prays for forgiveness in the form of chanting mantras. He plans to visit holy places and temples, health permitting. When and if he becomes immobile due to physical conditions, and the indications are that he is nearing his end, his children assemble around him and give him holy water from the Ganges. They sing *bhajan*s and chant mantras, often in a 24-hour-a-day vigil." Sivaya Subramuniyaswami wrote: "Blessed with the knowledge of impending transition, we settle affairs and take refuge in japa, worship, scripture and yoga—seeking the highest realizations as we consciously, joyously release the world. Our soul never dies; only the physical body dies. We simply step out of the physical body and are in our astral body, going on in the mind as usual. For Hindus, death is nobly referred to as *mahaprasthan*a, 'the great journey.' The awareness, will, memory and intelligence which we think of as ourselves continue to exist in the soul body. We approach death as a *sadhana*, as a spiritual opportunity. To leave the body in the right frame of mind, in the right consciousness, through the highest possible chakra, is a key to spiritual progress."

Pain Control

Hindus regard pain management as an important duty of care-givers. "If an individual opts to undergo the pains, he or she should be left alone," Swami Bua advised. "Otherwise, it is the duty of the people around to help reduce his suffering. If a person is relieved of pain, his thoughts become sublime, with gratitude and the feelings of amity, affection and love. Nobody should be allowed to die with feelings of bitterness, feelings of wanting or feelings of unfulfilled duties. We should do everything possible to keep the dying person comfortable till his end, which is determined by Him." Opiates and other drugs have been used for this purpose in Hindu medicine for thousands of years, according to Dr. Sodhi. However, he explained, "Practitioners try not to administer so much pain-killer as to alter or cause loss of consciousness." Excessive pain-killers can dull awareness and inhibit a conscious transition, which is the Hindu ideal.

Definition of Death

"When the physical body dies, this automatically severs the silver cord that connects the astral and physical bodies," Sivaya Subramuniyaswami explained. Metaphysically, this is the point of



death. Physically, death can be defined as the cessation of breath, heartbeat and brainwave activity, in that order. Even then, it may be possible to revive a person, and the patient may report a "near-death experience" of beginning the transition to the next world but being pulled back. Decay of the body is the definitive sign of death.

Autopsies

Autopsies are the examination of a dead body to learn the cause of death. Hindus believe that autopsies are disturbing to the still-aware soul which has just separated from the body and should therefore be avoided unless required by law. Similarly, embalming, which replaces the blood with a preservative fluid, is ill-advised.

Use of the Body After Death

In ancient times, doctors around the world used dead bodies to understand anatomy and practice surgery. In India, the bodies used for this purpose were those unclaimed by relatives or friends. According to Swami Bua, "In the Vedic Age, dissection and mutilation of body were considered detrimental to the fulfillment of life. Yet, if we consider that once the spirit leaves the body, the lifeless body has no karmic obligations, then it may be okay." Swami Pragyanaand pointed out that autopsy and dissection were practiced by Sushruta, an early pioneer of ayurveda. Swami Tejomayananda offered, "The body of the deceased is treated with reverence. The feelings and sentiments of the family also do not favor dissection. People have some fear that the

Last rites: Artist's rendering of the funeral procession held for Satguru Yogaswami of Sri Lanka (1872-1964). Tens of thousands joined to carry his body on a palanquin to the sandalwood funeral pyre. Cremation is preferred in the Hindu tradition, to quickly release the soul from the earth plane.

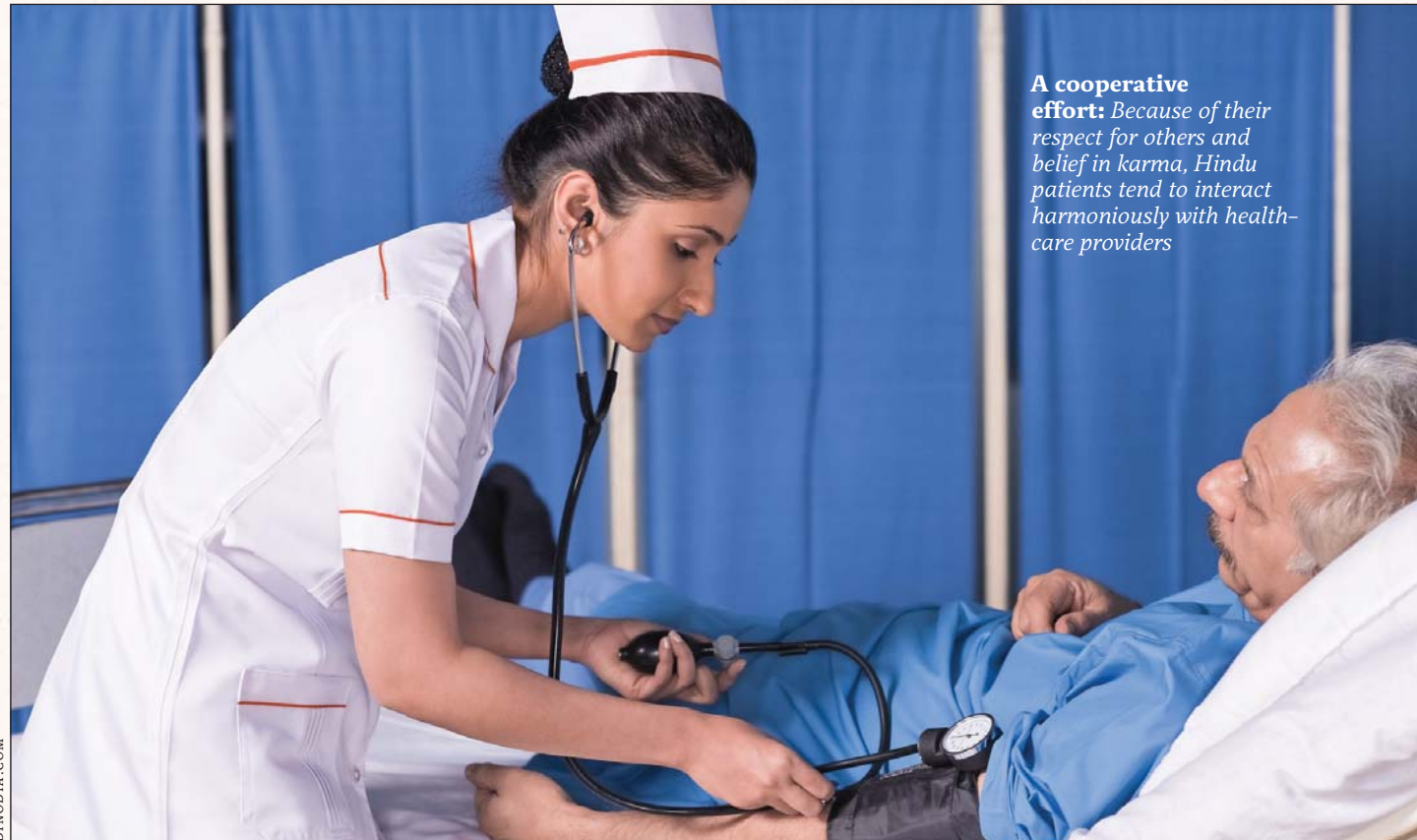
astral body may be hurt by these intrusions or some harm may come to the family." Sivaya Subramuniyaswami similarly held that what happens to the dead physical body is disturbing to the soul, and did not advise his devotees to donate their bodies to science.

Burial and Cremation Practices

Cremation, ideally held within 24 hours, is the traditional Hindu system of disposing of dead bodies. It has the benefit of releasing the soul most quickly from any lingering attachment to the earth plane. Should it be necessary to preserve the body a few days to allow time for distant relatives to arrive, refrigeration or use of dry ice is recommended, rather than embalming. Hindus do not bury their dead, except infant children and godly saints.

There remain several areas of medical ethics to be addressed, including genetic engineering, stem-cell research, cloning and animal to human transplants. If you have insights or comments, feel free to email them to us at letters@hindu.org.

A Health-Care Providers' Handbook on Hindu Patients



A cooperative effort: Because of their respect for others and belief in karma, Hindu patients tend to interact harmoniously with health-care providers

Excerpts from a new booklet by Queensland Health, Australia

A SKILLED MEDICAL GROUP IN AUSTRALIA HAS produced an impressively accurate and comprehensive 24-page booklet that is packed with vital, insightful information for health care providers. Put together in 2011 by the Queensland Health Multicultural Services (multicultural@health.qld.gov.au), it is entitled *Health Care Providers' Handbook on Hindu Patients*. The first half of the booklet, guidelines for health services, covers a wide gamut of subjects: including communication issues, religious observances, dietary needs, astrological beliefs, decision making, traditional medicines and remedies, medicines of animal origin, maternity services, home visits,

rehabilitation and end of life issues. The second half is devoted to Hindu beliefs that relate to health care. It includes cogent sections on food, karma, holy days, fasting, abortion and more. The text as written is in a terse summary form meant for easy access by care givers and we share it unedited, believing that its sensitive wisdom will guide health-care providers all over the world looking after the needs of Hindu patients. On the advisory committee, ensuring depth and authenticity, was a host of persons of Indian origin: Shyam Das, Kermeen Kansara, Vinita Khushal, Balaji Motamarri, Rajni Nair, Pt. Sanat Pandey, Surendra Prasad, Sarva-Daman Singh and Krimesh Shukla.

Introduction

Queensland is a culturally and religiously diverse state—in 2006 nearly one in five Queenslanders (17.9 per cent) was born overseas, 7.8 per cent of the population spoke a language other than English at home, and more than 129,000 people followed a religion other than Christianity. Between 2001 and 2006, one of the fastest growing religions in Queensland was Hinduism. Figures from the 2006 census show there are more than 14,000 Hindus living in Queensland [total population 4.5 million]. This figure is now likely to be higher, as between 2007–08 and 2009–10, permanent migration to Australia from Southern Asia (which includes India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal) was second only to permanent migration from Europe. The increasing cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in the Queensland population means that to be safe, health services need to be culturally appropriate and responsive. Research indicates a strong link between low cultural competence and poor quality health outcomes, and significant risks.

Personal level of adherence

Hinduism is the world's oldest living faith and third largest religion. It is practiced in many countries around the world, including by large populations in Southern and Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa, North America and Australia.

There is much diversity in the beliefs and practices of Hindus, with hundreds of diverse sects and no central doctrinal authority. As Hinduism grants individuals complete freedom to practice his or her religion as they choose, there are personal and cultural variations that

make it difficult to provide definitive rules and regulations that apply to all Hindu patients. Because of these personal variations, it is important that health care providers consult the patient about their personal level of religious observance and practice.

However, Hindu patients should not be regarded as a "special" group that require additional attention from health care providers. Due to the common Hindu beliefs of karma (the belief that every action has a consequence which is experienced in this or future lives) and reincarnation, Hindu patients may display acceptance of difficult circumstances and be inclined to comply with the instructions of health care providers.

Section I: Religious Observance

Hinduism grants individuals complete freedom to practice his or her religion as they choose. As a result, it is important that health care providers discuss religious observance needs with each patient. Some topics that health care providers may wish to discuss with their patients include prayer and meditation, bathing and cleanliness, dietary needs and astrological beliefs.

Prayer and Meditation

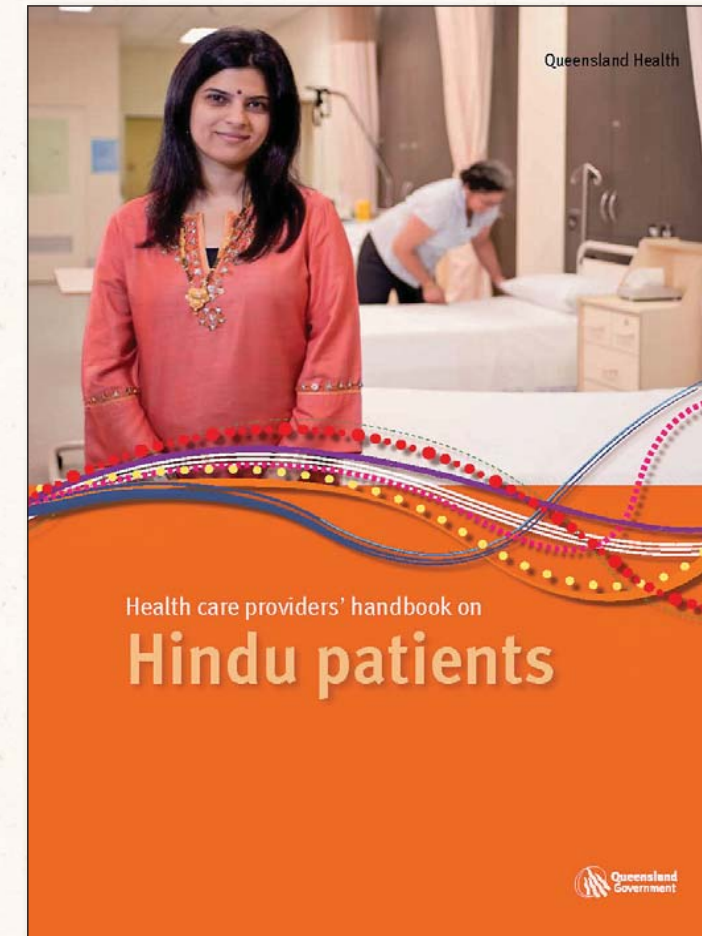
- Prayer and meditation are important to many Hindus.
- There are no set times for prayers; however, most Hindus prefer to pray in the morning.
- Prayer can take place in any location, including in bed or in hospital prayer rooms.
- Hindu patients may wish to have religious statues or icons close by when in hospital.

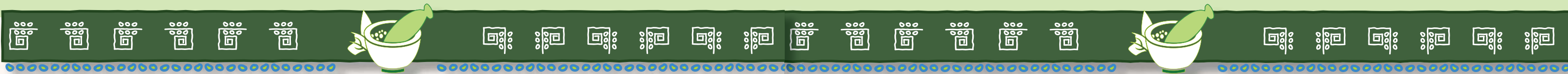
Bathing and Cleanliness

- The concept of purity is important to Hindu life, and some Hindus may be quite meticulous about bathing and cleanliness.
- Most Hindus have a ritual of cleanliness and prayer each morning which includes brushing the teeth immediately upon waking, followed by bathing, prayer and then eating.
- A delay in eating to follow this ritual should not be interpreted as a refusal to eat.
- Washing of hands prior to eating is important as many Hindus eat with their hands.
- Washing with running water is important to Hindus and most will prefer a shower rather than a bath.
- Women may be considered impure or unclean when menstruating or following childbirth.

Dietary Needs

- Many Hindus are strict vegetarians, abstaining from all meat, fish and eggs. Vegetarian Hindus do consume dairy products.
- Hindus who choose to follow a vegetarian diet do so because of a belief in nonviolence which extends to animals, and a belief that nonvegetarian food impedes spiritual development.
- Some Hindus choose to eat meat and do not follow a vegetarian diet.
- Most nonvegetarian Hindus do not eat beef or pork, as cows are considered sacred and pigs are considered unclean.
- Many nonvegetarian Hindus may choose to abstain from eating meat on particular days of the week. For example, a strict vegetarian diet may be observed on Mondays.
- Some strict vegetarian Hindus will not eat from plates or use utensils that have previously been used to serve meat.
- Most Hindus will eat only with the right hand. Some may not eat food which has been passed to them with the left hand.





- Fasting is common for Hindus and can vary from complete abstinence to only avoiding certain types of foods.
- Fasting on a particular day of the week is also a common practice.

Astrological beliefs

- Many Hindus hold strong astrological beliefs and may believe the movement of the planets has a strong influence on health and wellbeing.
- Patients may wish to schedule appointments or surgeries according to these beliefs.

Decision-making

Hinduism views the needs of the individual in the greater context of family, culture and environment. As a result, family members, especially elders, can have a strong influence on decision-making related to health matters, including informed consent. Hindus may wish for family members to be responsible for making treatment decisions.

Administration of medicines

Traditional Medicines and Remedies

Hindus may use a variety of ayurvedic medicines, home remedies and spiritual remedies, often in conjunction with Australian medicine. It is important for health care providers to be aware of their patient's preferences. Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine practiced by many Hindus around the world. It is a highly valued and respected health science in India. Ayurveda is practiced by many Hindus in Australia, and ayurvedic medicines are regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). As a discipline, ayurveda sits alongside Traditional Chinese Medicine in the TGA classification of complementary medicines.

Based on ayurvedic principles, Hindus believe that all illnesses, whether physical or mental, have a biological, psychological and spiritual element. Ayurveda seeks to maintain a balance between the body's three elemental energies (humors). Good and bad health is related to the level of balance of these three energies. Many Hindus also use traditional home remedies which are based on ayurvedic medicine and are easily available from Indian grocery stores.

One of the most common Hindu spiritual remedies is vibhuti, or holy ash. Vibhuti is commonly used in Hindu religious worship and is believed to contain protective, purifying and healing properties when applied on the skin (particularly on the forehead), consumed in small quantities, or carried on the person in a small packet.

Medicines of Animal Origin

Some medicines may not be suitable for Hindu patients because they are derived from cows, pigs or other animals. The Queensland Health Guideline on Medicines/Pharmaceutical Products of Animal Origin states that health care providers should inform patients about the origins of their proposed medication if it is derived from animals and no suitable synthetic alternative exists. Patients should be encouraged to make informed decisions regarding their treatment.

Oral Hygiene

- Oral hygiene is very important to most Hindus, especially those who practice ayurvedic principles.
- Many Hindus prefer to brush their teeth immediately after waking in the morning and some may also scrape their tongue with a metal tongue scraper. This is done to avoid the ingestion of impurities that may have built up in the mouth during sleep.
- Hindu patients may also wish to brush their teeth immediately after waking from general anesthesia or surgery for the same reason.



Serving with sensitivity: (above) A nurse's daily rounds; doctors everywhere are working to improve cultural knowledge of their patients

- Health care providers should explain the benefits of also brushing the teeth after eating.
- Many Hindus use home remedies for oral hygiene and health purposes, including chewing mint leaves, cloves or fennel seeds.
- Oral health examinations and treatments are usually not regarded as invasive by Hindu patients.

Maternity Services

- A small number of Hindu ceremonies accompany pregnancy and childbirth.
- While most of these ceremonies are completed in private, there are some which may be completed while the mother and infant are in hospital care.
- After childbirth, a Hindu father may wish to perform the *jatakarma* ceremony to welcome the infant into the world. As part of the ceremony, the father touches and smells the infant and whispers mantras (religious verses) into the infant's ears.
- Another rite which is performed shortly after birth involves drawing a small dot (often in the shape of an Om) behind the infant's ear. The Om symbol may also be placed on a chain around the infant's neck or placed in the cot.
- A family member may also wish to write the Om symbol on the infant's tongue with jaggery (unrefined whole cane sugar) dipped in ghee or honey.
- Health care providers should advise parents that feeding honey to infants below the age of 12 months is not



- recommended in Australia due to the risk of infant botulism.
- The sixth day after birth is considered the most auspicious in a person's life. On this day, a fragile white cotton thread is ceremoniously tied around the infant's wrist, ankle or neck. A pen and blank piece of paper may also be placed in the infant's cot, as it is believed that on this day Saraswati (Goddess of Learning) charts the child's future.
- Some Hindus may wish to bury the umbilical cord on the sixth day after birth. If there are clinical reasons for not providing the umbilical cord to the parents, this should be explained.
- The naming ceremony (*namakarana*) usually occurs at the infant's home after birth.
- Depending on family customs, the ceremony may be delayed if the infant requires extended hospital care.
- Some Hindu women may wish to express colostrum before feeding their baby for the first time.
- Health professionals should inform women of the benefits of feeding their infant colostrum.

Community health services

Home Visits

- Hindus may prefer for shoes to be removed when entering a home.
- If this is not possible for Workplace Health and Safety reasons, alternatives should be explored (e.g., wearing plastic shoe covers).
- Health care providers should avoid taking meat products into the homes of vegetarian Hindus.

Rehabilitation Issues

- Self care practices involving eating or drinking are ideally performed with the right hand.

- Health care providers should be aware that where a patient has lost the ability to use their right hand, sensitivity may be required.
- Similarly, loss of function in the left hand may affect the patient's comfort with bathing and washing habits.

Visiting Arrangements

- Visiting the sick is an important responsibility for Hindus.
- Hindu patients may have large numbers of visitors, including those from outside their immediate family.
- Health care providers should discuss with the patient, or their family, the impact a large number of visitors may have on rest or care requirements, and other patients.
- Patients may wish for family members to stay in the hospital overnight. This should be accommodated if possible.

Care of Family and Older Persons

- Hinduism encourages family members to take a role in the care of family members.
- Hinduism especially emphasizes respect for all older people, with children having a special responsibility towards their parents.
- It is considered a family obligation to care for the elderly and the sick.
- Health care providers should take this into account when developing care plans or suggesting nursing or residential care.

End of life issues

- The sanctity of life is central to Hindu teachings.
- Hindus believe that all living beings possess a soul which passes through successive cycles of birth and rebirth.
- Hindu patients may wish to die at home, as this has particular religious significance.

- The patient's eldest son is expected to be present before, during and after death, even if the son is a small child.
- Other family members may wish to be present and to participate in the care of the patient.
- Family members may request that patients not be told about a terminal diagnosis directly.
- A Hindu patient may wish for a pandit (priest) to be present to perform certain rituals, including: tying a sacred thread around the neck or wrist, placing a few drops of water from the River Ganges into the patient's mouth, placing a sacred tulsi leaf (holy basil) in the patient's mouth.
- A Hindu patient, especially a Hare Krishna follower, may wear sacred tulsi beads (a string of small wooden prayer beads) around their neck. It is important that these be on the body at the time of death.
- If it is necessary to remove these beads, they should be retied around the wrist (preferably right).
- Patients may wish to read or recite religious chants and prayers. However, some patients may prefer to listen on a personal media player or small radio.
- Hindu chaplaincy services are available in many Queensland Health facilities.

Deceased Patients

- A deceased Hindu's body is usually washed by close family members, with the eldest son taking a leading role.
- The family may wish to light a small lamp or burn incense near the body.
- If possible, all jewelry, sacred threads and religious objects should be left in place.
- Health care providers should advise family members if it is necessary to remove these items.
- The deceased patient's family may have a preference for the position of the body after death.
- Hindus are usually cremated as soon as possible after death.

Autopsy

- Hindus generally regard autopsies as unacceptable. However, autopsy is permitted if required under Queensland statutory laws.
- Hindus are usually cremated as soon as possible after death, and autopsy may affect this practice.
- Health care providers should consult with the family of a deceased Hindu patient before proceeding with an autopsy.

Section II: Hindu Beliefs Affecting Health Care

Food beliefs

Hindu dietary practices can vary depending on the individual's beliefs and customs. Most Hindus do not eat beef or pork and many follow a vegetarian diet. Fasting is common among Hindus, but there are no set rules, and the decision to fast is up to the individual. Many Hindus follow ayurvedic dietary practices. Under this system, certain foods are classified as hot or cold and can adversely or positively affect health conditions and emotions. The classification of foods as hot or cold is unrelated to temperature. Hot foods are generally those foods which are salty, sour or high in animal protein, while cold foods are generally sweet or bitter. Some strict Hindus do not consume garlic or onion, as the properties of these foods disturb spiritual practices such as meditation.



Karma

- A central belief of Hinduism is the doctrine of karma, the law of cause and effect.
- Hindus believe that every thought, word and action accumulates karma, which can affect current and future lives.
- Hindus believe in reincarnation. Actions from a past life can affect events in the current life, including health and well-being.
- Health care providers should be aware that a strong belief in karma can affect decision-making regarding health care.

Holy days

Hindus do not observe a specific day of worship, although some days of the week may be associated with particular Deities. Hindus do observe a number of holy days and festivals which can have an impact on health care due to associated fasts. Most Hindu holy days are based on the lunar calendar, and the dates can vary from year to year. Some festivals can occur over an extended period, with celebrations lasting for days or weeks.

Fasting

Fasting is an integral part of Hinduism and is seen as a means of purifying the body and the soul, encouraging self-discipline and gaining emotional balance. Fasting may be practiced on specific days of the



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week, during festivals or on holy days, or in conjunction with special prayers. It is not considered obligatory for a Hindu patient to fast during hospitalization. However, some patients may wish to fast while in hospital. There is no specified way to fast, but individuals may choose to abstain completely from all food and drink or only abstain from certain foods.

Dress

While there is no religious requirement for modest dress, many Hindus choose to dress modestly and may be reluctant to be examined by health care providers of the opposite sex. Hindu women may wear a sacred thread or gold chain around their necks, and Hindu men and boys may wear a sacred thread across the chest. These items should not be removed during examination. If it is necessary to remove an item, permission should be sought prior to removal.

Hare Krishna followers, and some other Hindus, may wear sacred tulsi beads around the neck. If it is necessary to remove these beads, they should be retied around the wrist (preferably right). In addition, some jewelry worn by Hindus may have a sacred meaning, and patients should be consulted before removal.

Mental health and/or cognitive Dysfunction

Hindus believe that all illnesses, whether physical or mental, have a biological, psychological and spiritual element. Treatments which do not address all three causes may not be considered effective by a Hindu patient.

Health throughout life: (left to right) A couple take joy in their new child, born in a modern hospital; administering intravenous medication

Many Hindus attach a stigma to mental illness and cognitive dysfunction. Many have a strong belief in the concept of the evil eye and may believe this to be a cause of mental illness. In addition, all illness, including mental illness, may be seen as the result of karma from this life or a previous life.

Transplants and Organ Donation

Hinduism supports the donation and transplantation of organs. The decision to donate or receive organs is left to the individual.

Contraception

There is no official Hindu position on contraception.

Abortion

Beliefs about abortion may vary depending on cultural or religious interpretations. Many Hindus believe that the moment of conception marks the rebirth of an individual, which may make abortion unacceptable, except in emergencies.

Assisted Reproductive Technologies

There is no official Hindu position on assisted reproductive technologies.

Pain Management

Hinduism encourages the acceptance of pain and suffering as part of the consequences of karma. It is not seen as a punishment, but as a natural consequence of past negative behavior and is often seen as an opportunity to progress spiritually. This may affect triaging or the monitoring of pain levels as Hindu patients may not be forthcoming

about pain and may prefer to accept it as a means of progressing spiritually. However, this behavior may be less prevalent in Australia, especially among young people.

Death and Dying

Hindus believe that the time of death is determined by one's destiny and accept death and illness as part of life. As a result, treatment is not required to be provided to a Hindu patient if it merely prolongs the final stages of a terminal illness. Under these circumstances, it is permitted to disconnect life supporting systems. However, suicide and euthanasia are forbidden in Hinduism.

Web Resources

The booklet, in its fullness (including a list of appropriate Hindu vegetarian foods at the back), can be seen here:

www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/health_workers/hbook-hindu.asp

A religious calendar that includes Hindu holy days may be found at: www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/support_tools/mcsr.asp

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Namaste: Greeting the Divine

The Western handshake versus the Eastern *anjali mudra*: daily gestures that reveal much about two distinct cultures

BY THE EDITOR

“SHAKE HANDS AND COME OUT FIGHTING.” IT’S THE REFEREE’S final counsel to two pugilists about to beat each other’s brains out with clenched fists. Even outside the ring, a handshake can be a little off-putting. When one returns to the West from an extended sojourn in India or elsewhere in Asia, the hand suddenly thrust forward can seem more ominous than friendly, especially if the hand offered is that of a stranger.

This moment of intimidation has a history. According to some anthropologists, one early manifestation of the handshake in the West arose in medieval Europe. More than a few men approached others on the byways with daggers drawn for self-defense. To fend off the fear of a foe’s foul foil, weapons would be sheathed, and men would offer to each other open, visibly empty hands. It was a kind of surety, a gesture of trust which said, “See, I am unarmed. So you may safely let me approach.” Soon the gesture itself took on broad meaning, and less lethal men on the street adopted the handshake as the proper way to greet others.

In much of the world today, people do not shake hands when they meet. They may hug formally and kiss one another on the cheek, as in Eastern Europe and Arab states. They may bow softly, eyes turned to the ground, as in Japan and China. The Hawaiian greeting, termed *honi*, consists of placing the nostril gently beside that of the person greeted, a sharing of breath, life and prana.

For Hindus, of course, the greeting of choice is *namaste*. With both hands pressed together and held near the heart, the head gently bowed, one says, “Namaste,” or “Namaskara,” “Namaskaram” or “Namaskar” in the varied languages of the subcontinent. It is both a spoken greeting and a gesture, a mantra and a *mudra*. The prayerful hand position is a *mudra* called *anjali*, from the root *anj*, “to adorn,” “honor,” “celebrate.” The hands held in union signify the oneness of

an apparently dual cosmos, the bringing together of spirit and matter, or the self meeting the Self. In Sanskrit *namas* means “bow,” “obeisance,” “reverential salutation.” It comes from the root *nam*, which carries meanings of bending, humbly submitting and becoming silent; *te* means “to you.” Thus *namaste* means “I bow to you.”

Namaste has become a veritable icon of Indianness. Indeed, there must be an Indian law that requires every travel brochure, calendar and poster to include an image of someone with palms pressed together, conveying to the world India’s hospitality, spirituality and graceful consciousness. And there can be subtle ways of enhancing the gesture, as in the West one might shake another’s hand too strongly, to impress and overpower them, or too briefly, indicating the withholding of genuine welcome. In the case of *namaste*, a deeper veneration is sometimes expressed by bringing the fingers of the clasped palms to the forehead, where they touch the brow, the site of the mystic third eye. A third form of *namaste* brings the palms completely above the head, a gesture said to focus consciousness in the subtle space just above the *brahma-randhra*, the aperture in the crown chakra. This form is so full of reverence it is reserved for God and the holiest of *satgurus*.

It is always interesting and often revealing to muse about the everyday cultural traits and habits that evolve in each nation and community. For instance, a saw for cutting lumber, if designed in the USA, is made in such a way that the carpenter leans into the saw, cutting away from his body. But in Japan saws are engineered so that the cutting takes place as the carpenter draws the saw toward himself. A small detail, but it yields a big difference. One is a thrust of power, the other provides more control in the cut, requiring surprisingly less effort. Each has its place in the global toolbox. Each speaks—like the handshake and *namaste* greeting—of an underlying



perception of man’s relationship with things.

In the West we are more outgoing, forceful, externalized. Phone and web companies tell us, “Reach out and touch somebody.” We are unabashedly acquisitive, defining our progress in life by how much we have—how much wealth, influence, stored-up knowledge, status or whatever. Every culture exhibits such traits to some extent, but in the East, Mother is there to remind us, “Reach in and touch the Self.” Here we are taught to be more introspective, more concerned with the quality of things than their quantity, more attuned with the interior dimension of life, where things are not the thing. So there you have it, the whole of Eastern and Western culture summed up in the handshake, which reaches out horizontally to greet another, and *namaste*, which reaches in vertically to acknowledge that, in truth, there is no other.

As a test of how these two greetings differ, imagine you are magically confronted with the Divine. God walks up to you on the street, like George Burns in the movie “O God!” What do you do? Reach out to shake His/Her hand? Probably not. Though suitable between man and man, it’s an unseemly expression between man and God. We never shake hands with God. I mean, what if your palms are sweating? So, you *namaste* instead. The reason it feels natural to *namaste* before God is that it is, in its very essence, a spiritual gesture, not a worldly one. By a handshake we acknowledge our equality with others. We reveal our humanity. We convey how strong we are, how

nervous, how aggressive or passive. There is a bold physicality to it. For these and other reasons, Popes never shake hands. Kings never shake hands. Even mothers don’t shake hands with their own children.

Namaste is cosmically different. Kings do *namaste*. *Satgurus namaste* and mothers *namaste* to their own family. We all *namaste* before God, a holy man or holy place. The *namaste* gesture bespeaks our inner valuing of the sacredness of all. It betokens our intuition that all souls are divine. It reminds us in quite a graphic manner, and with insistent repetition, that we can see God everywhere and in every human being we meet. It is saying, silently, “I see the Deity in us both, and bow before It. I acknowledge the holiness of even this mundane meeting. I cannot separate that which is spiritual in us from that which is human and ordinary.”

And while we are singing the praises of *namaste*, it should be observed how efficient a gesture it is in an age of mass communication. A politician, or performer can greet fifty thousand people with a single *namaste*, and they can return the honor instantly. In such a situation a handshake is unthinkable and a mere waving of one hand is somehow frivolous. Recently, many non-Hindus, especially celebrities, are adopting *namaste* to avoid transmission of contact diseases.

There are other, more mystical meanings behind *namaste*. The nerve currents of the body converge in the feet, the solar plexus and the hands. Psychic energy leaves the body at these junctures. To “ground” that energy and balance the flow of prana streaming through the nerve system, yogis cross their legs in the lotus posture, and bring their hands together. The *anjali mudra* acts like a simple yogic asana, balancing and harmonizing our energies, keeping us centered, inwardly poised and mentally protected. It closes our aura, shielding us psychically. It keeps us from becoming too externalized, thus we remain close to our intuitive nature, our superconsciousness.

We asked a number of Hindus for their insights into *namaste*, what it means and why we do it. Here are a few responses:

“Namaste elevates one’s consciousness, reminding one that all beings, all existence is holy, is God. It draws the individual inward for a moment, inspires reflection on the deeper realities, softening the interface between people. It would be difficult to offend or feel animosity toward anyone that you greet as God.”

“I have a poster that says it well: ‘Namaste! I honor the place in you in which the entire universe dwells. I honor the place in you which is of love, of truth, of light and peace. When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are one!’”

“Namaste is a gesture of friendship and kindness, also of thanks or special recognition. Mystically it is called *namaskara mudra* in the Agamic puja, and it centers one’s energy within the spine.”

“I’ve heard it means, ‘I salute God within you.’ The true *namaste* gesture is accompanied by bowing the head and shoulders slightly. This is a gesture that lessens our sense of ego and self-centeredness, requiring some humility to do it well—whereas shaking hands can be quite an arrogant event.”

“Touching the hands together puts you in touch with your center, your soul. Namaste puts you forward as a soul, not an outer personality.”

“The gesture has a subtle effect on the aura and nerve system. Bringing focused attention and a collection of one’s forces, so to speak. It also protects against unnecessary psychic connections which are fostered by shaking hands. This might be called a form of purity also—protecting one’s energies.”

“This form of acknowledgement is so lovely, so graceful. Just look at two people in *namaste* and you will see so much human beauty and refinement.”



Universal greeting: (left to right) Balinese priest greets a tourist; Prince Charles on a visit to India; California businesswoman. (above) Garuda, Vishnu’s eagle mount, on a temple in Singapore.



KARNATAKA

Chitrapur's Innovative Leader

Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji sets new patterns for passing dharma to the next generation and service to his community

BY SHAILAJA GANGULY, MUMBAI

AT THE AGE OF 35, A YOUNG SWAMI from the Saraswat brahmin community was immersed in his sadhanas at Mount Abu, Rajasthan, when an emissary of his community approached him regarding the spiritual leadership of the Chitrapur Math in Karnataka. The head of the *math*, His Holiness Parijnanashram III Swamiji, had just passed away without naming his successor. The emissary's request: that Swamiji take over the *math*. Thus did His Holiness Shrimat Sadyojat Shankarashrama Swamiji become the eleventh guru of this lineage. He is notably

publicity shy; only after three years of polite requests did he finally grant me the interview for this article.

There are approximately 25,000 Saraswat brahmins today. Many live in Karnataka, but they are also found across northern India, from Kashmir to Bengal, and now in other countries, including the US. They trace their origins to the Saraswati River civilization and find mention in the Vedas. Prior to 1700, some of them—Smarta Saraswats, who follow the teachings of Adi Shankara—migrated from the Goa area to Karnataka, without a spiritual leader. This was a period when a number of Hindu communities were fleeing

the persecution and atrocities then common in the Portuguese colony.

Around 1700, a sannyasin of the Ashram order (one of the Dasanami orders of sadhus) came to Karnataka from Kashmir. He became Shrimat Parijnanashram I Swamiji (the "I" differentiating him from subsequent heads of the same name) and established the first *math* in Gokarna. His successor, Swami Shankarashram I (of the same name as the current head), firmly established the *math's* spiritual authority in the Saraswat community. Upon his passing in 1757, the Chitrapur Math was founded at the site of his samadhi (burial) in the seaside village of Shirali. In a pattern oddly frequent to this lineage, he left no designated successor, so one had to be chosen from the community, as was the case in 1997 with the ordination of our Swami Shankarashram.

Capturing the Next Generation

A natural teacher and lecturer, Swamiji has developed innovative

Carrying on 300-year-old traditions: (top) Swami performs Vyasa puja on Guru Purnima. (left) Shri Chitrapur Math, Shirali, Karnataka



Upliftment programs: (clockwise) Swamiji holds a interactive discussion during a camp for young adults; classical Sanskrit study for boys at the math's Veda Pathasala; computer literacy is part of the Srivali High School syllabus; young ladies' vocational training sponsored by the Parijnan Foundation offers them financial independence

programs with a particular focus on engaging the community's youth. With the help of about 75 young adults trained as workers and leaders, Swamiji established eight prarthana centers in 2007 for children of ages 5-15. Now there are 41 schools, including five in the US and one in the UK.

Swami explained, "Many parents felt guilty and helpless. Their children were not getting value-based education, even in the best of schools. If both parents work or do not know enough and there are no grandparents, children have no one to tell them stories or anecdotes and make them aware of their glorious heritage. Our leaders have also helped children who are unwilling to share problems with their parents—or whose problems have actually been compounded by the parents. They are now keen to participate regularly and take part in interactive discussions and all the creative and cultural activities."

In addition to the prarthana centers there are 23 yuvadhara centers for some 700 young adults, actively involved in various projects such as cleaning, tree-planting, festivals, PowerPoint presentations of the *math's* work and more. "They sense a growing identification with something good and worthy," Swamiji says. "Here the youth have opportunities to express themselves and their potential in ways not available in the classrooms."

The *math* has produced a well-made video (bit.ly/ChitrapurYouth) on one of their 2012 youth camps. Two camps are held each year, one in Pune and one in Bengaluru, engaging city-raised children in a wide range of activities—puja, garland making, worship, spreading manure in fields, cleaning reservoir ponds, meditating and even martial arts. Judging by the video, it is an exemplary program.

The *math* also runs a small Veda *pathashala* (priest training school) with twelve boys in residence. When trained, they will

serve either in their home community or in Chitrapur and its related math.

In 2002, to encourage the use of Sanskrit, Swami created an educational program called Girvaana Pratishtha, which now has 18 centers in India and three abroad. Sixty devotees have completed the teacher's training, 1500 have passed the conversation test and 1,000 have passed the theory exam.

Through the Srivali Trust, Chitrapur Math has established Srivali High School with 352 students and Mallapur High School with 250. A second agency, the Parijnan Foundation, funds a 45-seat program of vocational training for 45 underprivileged young women. So far, Swamiji reports, "Over 500 have graduated and many have started their own businesses."

A museum at the *math* displays books and sculptures, some quite ancient, to inspire the younger generation. "Volunteers help clean and preserve our vast collection of palm-leaf manuscripts, which are then photographed and preserved for posterity," says Swamiji.

Life at Chitrapur Math

The *math* has a 35-acre campus with an additional 25 acres of farm land. Worship, bhajana and cultural events are attended by 150 to 200 visitors daily and as many as two thousand on festival days. When in residence, Swamiji gives discourses and holds guided meditations.

Every day at 6 am brahmin priests conduct an hour-long puja, with Swamiji doing the abhishekam to the six Sivalingams at the six samadhi shrines of earlier gurus and other shrines. At midday there is arati for the main Deity, Lord Bhavanishankar, and Swamiji's predecessor. From 4 pm to 7 pm, Swamiji is available to visitors. The main puja and abhishekam of the day, for Lord Bhavanishankar, begins at 7 pm. Swami sets aside one or



two days a week for a personal silent retreat.

During the rainy season, July through September, Swamiji observes the Chaturmasya Vrata tradition by remaining in one of the lineage's other math—Shirali, Gokarna, Mallapur, Mangalore, Bengaluru, Pune or Karla—and his resident center becomes the "parent *math*" during that time. He has taken devotees on pilgrimage to Mount Kailas, Chardham, Amarnath, Vaishnodevi, and two journeys to trace the course of the ancient River Saraswati.

Swamiji reaches the global Saraswat community through his books on meditation, monthly *math* newsletter, audio CDs and the Internet. For more information, go to www.chitrapurmath.net or listen to Swamiji on YouTube at bit.ly/chitrapur

SHAILAJA GANGULY of Mumbai is a journalist and Saraswat brahmin. She has assisted the *math* with its DVDs, publications and in writing bhajanas and songs.

Steps to Reach the Absolute

To attain our true Self requires honing our humility and aspiration through service, fitness and purification, followed by consistent meditation

BY HIS HOLINESS SADYOJAT SHANKARASHRAM SWAMIJI

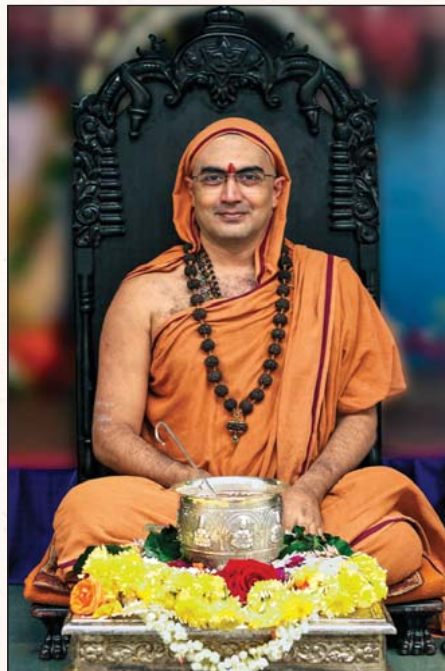
Aside from his social service work, Swamiji is a raja yoga adept. He regularly conducts guided meditation sessions in two complementary forms. One is indoors, with eyes closed in the traditional manner. The other, known as Ashtamoorti Upasana, is outdoors, with eyes open, at a scenic spot where the participant is taught how to meditate on the elements and arrive at one's True Self in an illuminating, methodical and unhurried manner. Swamiji shares these thoughts about sadhana.

SEVA PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE aspirant's search for the Absolute, the Ultimate Truth. It brings about purification, strengthens the connection with the Divine and thus helps to stabilize a sadhaka's spiritual search. The earnest desire to learn, *shrotum iccha*, is slowly built up through seva. Along with this is kindled the awareness of both the benefits and the responsibilities of a serious seeker. You begin to stop paying attention to that "me, me" feeling as you try keenly to understand more about the principle of serving others. Thus the mind is occupied and alert, but its dependence on the ego begins to lessen. It is no longer "I-centric."

When you work within a group, you gradually learn to assert or tone down your opinion as needed, because here the goal is more important than petty concerns like "I have been insulted" or "I did the work and someone else took the credit." There is an element of dispassion, *tyaga*, in your effort, because it is not made for personal gain. When you are serving your master, your guru, there is a lot of reverence and purity in your actions, because you look up to him and are giving without any selfish motive. Seva done in the right spirit is the first step towards true surrender.

Physical fitness is also very important. Making time for exercise is a must. The good effects of a regular workout can be felt very soon. If you do not have a proper diet and are overweight and unhealthy, you cannot have the tenacity that is required for sustained spiritual practice. Moderation is the key for fitness of the body and consequently of the mind as well.

Then we can take steps in meditation. The untrained mind is like a child who needs to be placated before getting disciplined and drawn towards the right point of focus. The mind harbors many *samskaras*—inherited traits and conditioning—which cannot be erased in a trice. That is why mantra-japa is advised. Concentration on a mantra helps a beginner, in particular, to hold other thoughts at bay until he realizes that he is learning to surrender to a divine force that exists within and without. Consistency helps the seeker to shed all the negativity within until he understands that "pure" is not what



he has to become. "Pure" is who he is!

The mind has to be made aware of the need for relaxation, the need for discovering something very calm, very peaceful. Feeling that I am wasting my time because I am not "doing" anything is self-defeating. Doing a few warm-ups and exercises, breathing deeply and learning yogic processes—like *kapalbhati* or *anulom-vilom* (breathing exercises) from a qualified teacher—enable your body and mind to receive the fruits of meditation.

Regular meditation can bring mental equipoise, strengthen your willpower immensely, generate enthusiasm and inspiration in day-to-day tasks and thereby enhance your efficiency. Meditation, therefore, is a must to learn how to draw upon your inner resources, how to connect with your Higher Self.

In the initial stage of sadhana, having accepted that this is as a place for learning, the seeker is filled with zeal; he is respectful and eager to follow, even imitate all that he observes in the guru.

This infuses a certain discipline; it gives his mind lessons about some dos and don'ts. He does not seek any explanation, nor is he ready to receive it at this point of time.

Gradually, unconsciously, he begins to develop a *shivmayi drishti* (purity of thought and outlook). His negative thinking fades away because *amangalata* (any form of impure thought or behavior) has absolutely no chance to flourish. His ability to see and appreciate the good in others increases, along with tolerance and acceptance. His spontaneity, clarity of mind and the need to express this creative energy in better and better ways accelerates.

Finally he becomes ready and worthy to receive the grace that was waiting to bless him. There is a complete burning away of all the limitations that were earlier the identification marks for his ego. The petty ego now gives way to total purity, the *shuddha aham*, and the blissful discovery that "I am not who I thought I was! This *shivatva*—this totality and vastness of pure consciousness—of which I was getting glimpses now and then—is my own *swarupa*, my True Self!"

HIS HOLINESS SADYOJAT SHANKARASHRAM SWAMIJI, 48, is 11th in the Paramapara of Mathadhipathis of Shri Chitrapur Math, Shirali, Karnataka, India, the spiritual sanctum of 25,000 Chitrapur Saraswats scattered all over the globe. See www.chitrapurmath.net



“Sitting on the last bit of Indian rock—I hit upon a plan: Suppose some disinterested sannyasins, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all, down to the Chandala—can’t that bring forth good in time?”

“We, as a nation, have lost our individuality, and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses.”

Swami Vivekananda, December, 1892

A place of resolve: The Vivekananda Rock Memorial, built in 1970 to honor the swami, sits on a huge rock 500 meters off the coast of Kanya Kumari. He swam out to the rock in the turbulent waters to meditate one day in December of 1892. There he pondered his future mission, as quoted to the left. (below) A photo of the closing session of the 1893 Chicago World’s Parliament of Religions in an auditorium that seated 7,000. Vivekananda (circled) can be seen on the stage, where days earlier he gave his rousing address, which, in the words of Prof. Sankari Prasad Basu, “won recognition for his country’s ancient heritage, and thereby gave back to his countrymen their long-lost self-esteem and self-confidence.”

After 150 Years, the Voice of Vivekananda Still Resounds

The religious beliefs of Indians and Americans bear the indelible imprint of this compellingly Hindu monk

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 150TH BIRTHDAY OF SWAMI Vivekananda, born January 12, 1863, in Calcutta. We celebrate his life and legacy by exploring his early upbringing, his appearance at the 1893 Chicago World’s Parliament of Religions, his triumphant return to India, his influence on Hindu identity and nationalism during the independence struggle and his founding of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

Any evaluation of his life’s work must consider and appreciate India’s astoundingly depressed state at the time—its economy depleted by decades of exploitation under the British Raj, its citizens bereft of pride and purpose, its British-educated intellectuals believing

that the country’s traditions were not even worth salvaging. The people of India were losing heart, and the recognition he earned in the West was immensely encouraging to India’s elite and common man alike.

The vast wealth of resources on Swami’s thirteen-years public mission includes eight volumes of his collected works and several anthologies safeguarding thousands of letters and newspaper reports. From these have arisen hundreds of books. Our writers have drawn upon this material, often letting Swami speak for himself, so that his own voice and vision may be heard, without need for interpretation. Happy birthday, Swamiji!



FORMATIVE YEARS

We begin with a summary short biography by Prof. Jeffrey D. Long, an expert on Swami's life and teachings.

BORN TO A SOLID MIDDLE-CLASS HINDU family in Kolkata on January 12, 1863—while the American Civil War raged on the other side of the globe, and six years after a famous but sadly unsuccessful attempt by his countrymen to rise in force against British imperial domination—Narendranath Datta, later known as Swami Vivekananda, would be deeply affected by the currents of thought flowing among the English-educated elites of Bengal in the nineteenth century.

An air of skepticism prevailed among many young Bengalis during Vivekananda's early years. Should one worship God with form, as the Hindu traditionalists continued to do, or without form, as taught by new movements, such as the Brahmo Samaj? Should one believe in a God at all, or was Western science able to explain everything, without any recourse to supernatural beings? These questions, and many others, filled the intellectual atmosphere in which the young Naren lived and breathed—an atmosphere not unlike that which prevails in much of our world today.

Having an even more skeptical and inquiring mind than most, the highly educated Naren was encouraged by a friend to meet Sri Ramakrishna, a priest at the Dakshineswar temple of the Goddess Kali who was known for his ecstatic visions and wise teachings, as well as for his intensely personal longing for

the Divine.

The 1881 meeting of Narendranath Datta with Ramakrishna reads like an episode from one of the great Hindu epics. The doubting Naren asks Sri Ramakrishna, "Have you seen God?" "Yes," Ramakrishna replies without hesitation, "Though more intensely than I am seeing you right now." The rest of their conversation leads young Naren to suspect that Ramakrishna is truly mad. According to Naren's own account, Ramakrishna "folded his palms together and began addressing me as if I was some divine being, 'I know who you are, My Lord. You are Nara, the ancient sage, the incarnation of Narayana. You have come to earth to take away the sufferings and sorrows of mankind.'" Despite his doubts, though, Naren found Ramakrishna to be compelling. "'Here is a true man of renunciation,' I said to myself; 'he practices what he preaches; he has given up everything for God.'" Drawn irresistibly to Ramakrishna's uniquely charismatic personality, Naren and a number of other young men became regular visitors to Ramakrishna's home at Dakshineswar. Over the course of the next five years, until Ramakrishna's death from throat cancer in 1886, Naren and his fellow seekers received teaching from Ramakrishna.

The Goal: Realization

In his lecture "My Master," given in 1896, Vivekananda spoke about his guru: "For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he saw God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. I actually saw that religion could be given. One

touch, one glance, can change a whole life. I have read about Buddha and Christ and Mohammed, about all those different luminaries of ancient times, how they would stand up and say, 'Be thou whole,' and the man became whole. I now found it to be true, and when I myself saw this man, all skepticism was brushed aside. It could be done. Religion is not talk, or doctrines, or theories; nor is it sectarianism. It is the relation between the soul and God. Religion does not consist in erecting temples, or building churches, or attending public worship. It is not to be found in books, or in words, or in lectures, or in organizations. Religion consists in realization. As a fact, we all know that nothing will satisfy us until we know the truth for ourselves. However we may argue, however much we may hear, but one thing will satisfy us, and that is our own realization; and such an experience is possible for every one of us if we will only try."

Sannyas Life

Shortly before his death, Ramakrishna gave a select group of his disciples orange robes and initiated them into sannyasa, or renunciation, thus laying the foundation for the Ramakrishna Order. After their master's passing, the young monks began living together as a community, forming the nucleus of what would eventually become Belur Math, the central headquarters of the order, in Kolkata, just across the Hooghly River and slightly to the south of Dakshineswar.

In 1900, at—of all places—the Shakespeare Club of Padasena in California, Vivekananda explained the nature of Hindu monasticism: "The sannyasins do not possess property, and

they do not marry. Beyond that there is no organization. The only bond that is there is the bond between the teacher and the taught—and that is peculiar to India. The teacher is not a man who comes just to teach me, and I pay him so much, and there it ends. In India it is really like an adoption. The teacher is more than my own father, and I am truly his child, his son in every respect. I owe him obedience and reverence first, before my own father even; because, they say, the father gave me this body, but he showed me the way to salvation, he is greater than father. And we carry this love, this respect for our teacher all our lives."

The Wandering Years

Naren—henceforth known by his monastic name of Swami Vivekananda—felt a calling to live for a time as a wandering sannyasin. Leaving Kolkata, he traveled the length and breadth of India, visiting such cities as Banaras and Baroda, spending time in solitary meditation in the Himalayas.

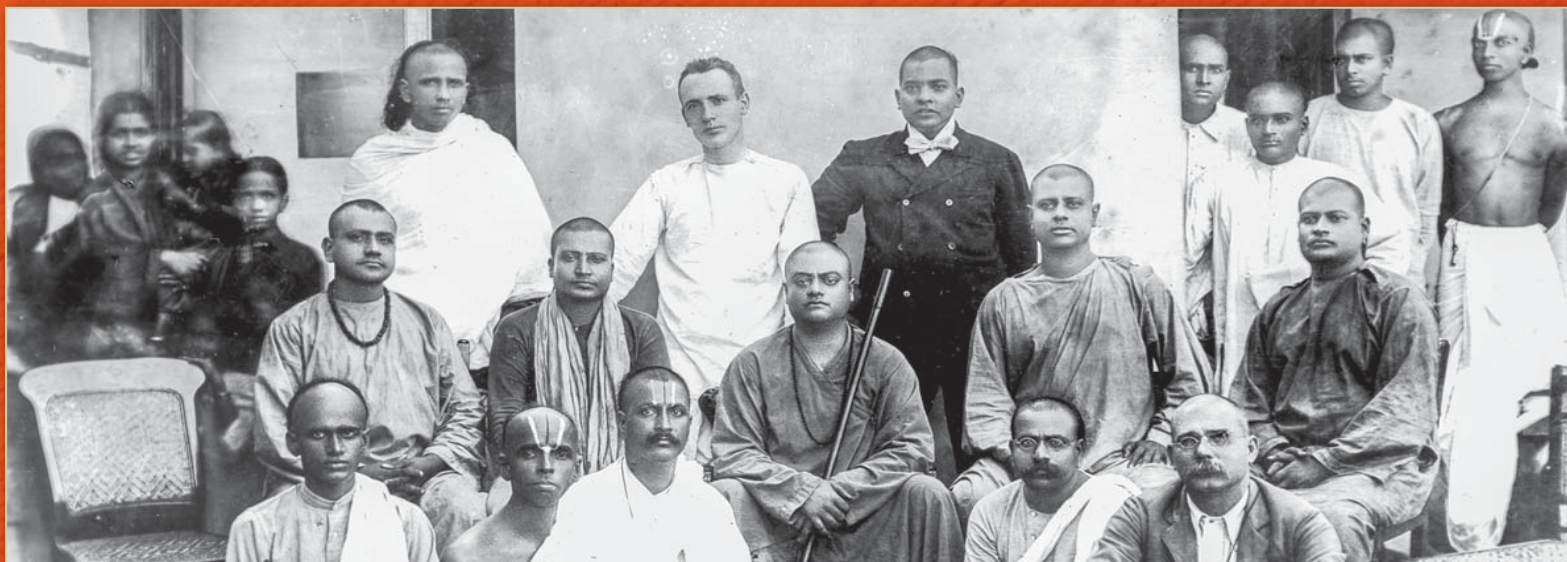
He spoke of this time in a lecture in Southern California: "Wandering tells on the body in the long run: sometimes one meal at nine in the evening, another time a meal at eight in the morning, another after two days, another after three days—and always the poorest and roughest thing. Who is going to give to the

The master's power: (clockwise from right) Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886) in a blissful state; Swami Vivekananda at a picnic in Pasadena, California, 1900; Swamiji (center) with brother swamis (to his left and right) and local supporters, Madras, February, 1897

ALL PHOTOS: ST. LOUIS VEDANTA SOCIETY



The "Cyclonic Monk" takes America, then India, by storm...



beggar the good things he has? And then, they have not much in India. And most of the time walking, climbing snow peaks, sometimes ten miles of hard mountain climbing, just to get a meal. They eat unleavened bread in India, and sometimes they have it stored away for twenty or thirty days, until it is harder than bricks; and then they will give a square of that. I would have to go from house to house to collect sufficient for one meal. And then the bread was so hard, it made my mouth bleed to eat it. Literally, you can break your teeth on that bread. Then I would put it in a pot and pour over it water from the river. For months and months I existed that way—of course it was telling on the health.” In late 1892, after three years of wandering, he famously journeyed to the very southern tip of India and received a vision of the future of India while meditating on a rock off the coast that today bears his name. Encouraged by a local Hindu ruler, the Raja of Ramnad, who had become his disciple, Vivekananda resolved to undertake the trip that would change the world: to be a Hindu representative at the World’s Parliament of Religions, to be held in Chicago in September of 1893.

At the Parliament

“Sisters and Brothers of America,” began Swami Vivekananda’s renowned first address to the World’s Parliament of Religions, held at what is now the Art Institute of Chicago. “Sisters and Brothers of America” were bold words with which to begin a speech by an Indian monk in America in 1893. Racism was still rampant; slavery had been abolished by presidential decree just thirty-one years earlier. India remained under the heel

of British imperial rule, and most Americans of European descent still did not regard people of other ethnic groups as equals. Placing the word “sisters” before “brothers” was also significant. This was twenty-seven years before women in America were granted the right to vote.

Many in India today view Swami Vivekananda primarily as an Indian cultural hero and as a revitalizer and reformer of ancient Hindu traditions. In the context of America, he was in the vanguard of progressive social thought, treating people of all races, and both men and women, as equals. This was based on the Vedantic teaching he learned from his master, that God dwells in all beings. The significance of his opening words was not lost upon his audience, who roared their approval, forcing him to pause to let the applause die down before proceeding with the main body of his speech.

The major theme of Vivekananda’s address would be a central one of his teaching: the idea of “toleration and universal acceptance.” Speaking of Hindus generally, he says, “We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.”

On September 19 he gave his “Paper on Hinduism” to the Parliament, which contained his oft-repeated exhortation that man is not a sinner: “A Vedic sage stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings: ‘Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.’ ‘Children of immortal bliss’—what a sweet, what a hopeful

name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.”

Vivekananda denounced the opposites of toleration and acceptance—bigotry and fanaticism—in the second half of his speech. In his closing lines, he says, “I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.”

His success at the Parliament was widely reported both in the US and India, with the *The New York Herald* memorably stating, “He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him, we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.”

His National Impact in the US

Vivekananda was not the first Hindu teacher to visit North America. A Brahmo Samaj representative, Pratap Majumdar, had been in America prior to Vivekananda, and also attended and spoke at the 1893 Parliament. The groundwork for the reception of Swami Vivekananda’s ideas had also been laid by the intense interest in Hindu thought of

such major intellectual figures of nineteenth century America as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The Theosophists, and before them, the Transcendentalists, had produced a discourse that was ready for a direct infusion of Hindu thought and practice from the Subcontinent. Vivekananda was not the first, but he was the best received, becoming a celebrity figure whose travels and teachings were followed by all of the major newspapers of the day.

The Vivekananda phenomenon was not without some resistance. Racism, as mentioned, remained rampant, and the United States was a deeply Christian nation. There were those who sought to counter his influence. But there was also a deep vein of religious progressivism into which he successfully tapped. In 1894 he started the first Vedanta Society in New York. This organization then grew, becoming nationwide in its scope soon after Vivekananda returned to In-

dia and began dispatching his brother monks to lead the centers that sprouted up from Boston on the East Coast to San Francisco in the West.

THE SEDITIONARY MONK

We turn now to the impact of Vivekananda on India’s independence movement, excerpting (with some editing) from a comprehensive article by Prof. Sankari Prasad Basu (1928—) which appeared in the August, 1992, edition of Vivekananda Kendra Patrika.

AT THE OUTSET LET US REMIND OURSELVES of a known fact: Vivekananda was not directly involved in the Indian freedom movement. Nevertheless, he had tremendous influence on all phases of the movement. It has been said that Vivekananda’s influence on the Indian movement

was no less than the influence of Rousseau on the French revolution, or of Marx on the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

Without the background of wide national consciousness, no freedom movement is possible. From all contemporary sources it becomes evident that Vivekananda’s was the most forceful influence to rouse the national spirit in India. To quote Sister Nivedita, “He was a worker at foundations. Just as Ramakrishna, in fact, without knowing any books, had been a living epitome of the Vedanta, so was Vivekananda of the national life.”

We shall go briefly into what happened in the national field before Vivekananda’s advent. English education, vernacular literature, the Indian press, various reform movements and political associations, including the Congress, had come and spread their influence before him. In spite of all these, a pervading national consciousness was absent. Otherwise, how could *The Hindu* of

In Swami’s Own Words: The Future of India

“The Future of India” was a lecture to an audience of 3,000 given in Madras on February 14, 1897, at the Harmston Circus Pavilion. In it, Swami Vivekananda eloquently exhorts India’s youth to work for India’s freedom and makes the extraordinary prediction that it will take 50 years to obtain. In fact, 51 years and one week later, on February 20, 1947, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee announced India would be given full self government.

WHY IS IT, TO TAKE A CASE IN POINT, THAT FORTY MILLIONS OF Englishmen rule three hundred millions of people here?

What is the psychological explanation? These forty millions

put their wills together and that means infinite power, and you three hundred millions have a will each separate from the other. Therefore to make a great future India, the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power, coordination of wills. Already before my mind rises one of the marvellous verses of the *Rig-Veda Samhita* which says, “Be thou all of one mind, be thou all of one thought, for in the days of yore, the Gods being of one mind were enabled to receive oblations.” That the Gods can be worshipped by men is because they are of one mind. Being of one mind is the secret of society. And the more you go on fighting and quarreling about all trivialities

such as “Dravidian” and “Aryan,” and the question of Brahmins and non-Brahmins and all that, the further you are off from that accumulation of energy and power which is going to make the future India. For mark you, the future India depends entirely upon that. That is the secret—accumulation of will power, coordination, bringing them all, as it were, into one focus. So give up being a slave. For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India.



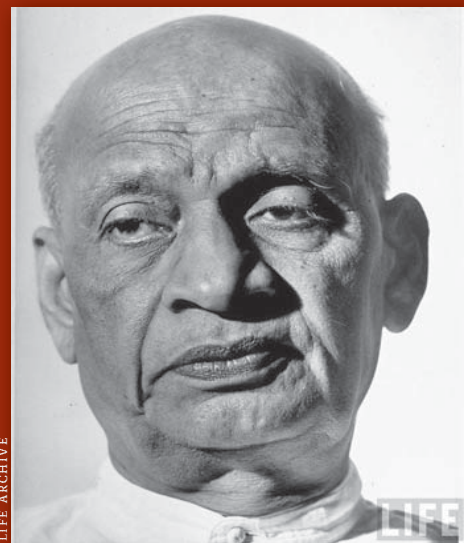
India’s Freedom Fighters: Mahatma Gandhi (1879–1948, at left in this 1938 photo) took the path of nonviolent protest; Subhas Chandra Bose (1897–1945?) took up armed resistance to British rule. Both were greatly inspired by Vivekananda.

Young men of Madras, my hope is in you. Will you respond to the call of your nation? Each one of you has a glorious future if you dare believe me. Have a tremendous faith in yourselves, like the faith I had when I was a child, and which I am working out now. Have that faith, each one of you, in yourself—that eternal power is lodged in every soul—and you will revive the whole of India. Ay, we will then go to every country under the sun, and our ideas will before long be a component of the many forces that are working to make up every nation in the world. We must enter into the life of every race in India and abroad; we shall have to work to bring this about. Now for that, I want young men. “It is the young, the strong, and healthy, of sharp

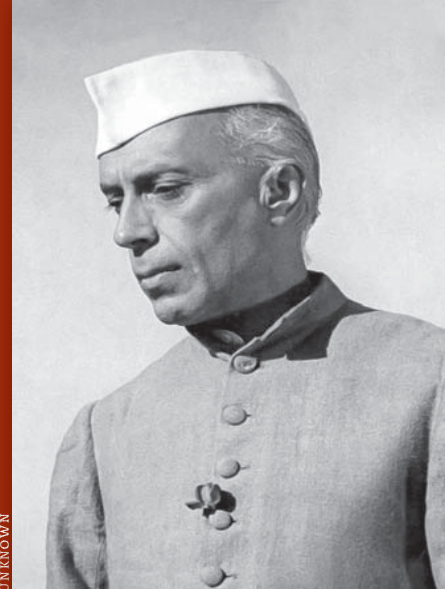
intellect that will reach the Lord,” say the Vedas. This is the time to decide your future—while you possess the energy of youth, not when you are worn out and jaded, but in the freshness and vigor of youth. Work—this is the time; for the freshest, the untouched, and unsmelled flowers alone are to be laid at the feet of the Lord, and such He receives. Rouse yourselves, therefore, for life is short. There are greater works to be done than aspiring to become lawyers and picking quarrels and such things. A far greater work is this sacrifice of yourselves for the benefit of your race, for the welfare of humanity. What is in this life? You are Hindus, and there is the in-

stinctive belief in you that life is eternal. Life is short, but the soul is immortal and eternal, and one thing being certain, death, let us therefore take up a great ideal and give up our whole life to it. Let this be our determination, and may He, the Lord, who “comes again and again for the salvation of His own people,” to quote from our scriptures—may the great Krishna bless us and lead us all to the fulfilment of our aims!

Swami: An Inspirer of Patriots



Key figures in India’s independence movement inspired by Vivekananda include (left) Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875–1950), who brought India’s independent princely states into the newly formed nation, and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), India’s first prime minister. (Below) the flag of the Provisional Government of Free India, established in Singapore in 1943 by militant freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose



Madras write in early 1893 about the religion of the major community, the Hindus, that "it is dead" and "its course is run"? But the same paper, along with others, including Anglo-Indian and missionary papers, wrote in less than one year's time (and also afterwards) that "the present time may be described as the renaissance period in the history of Hindus" (*Madras Christian College Magazine*, March 1897). It was called a "national uprising" (*Madras Times*, 2 March 1895). How did this miracle happen? The only answer that we derive from contemporary accounts is that Vivekananda appeared at the Parliament of Religions, proclaimed there the glory of Indian religion and civilization, won recognition for his country's ancient heritage, and thereby gave back to his countrymen their long-lost self-esteem and self-confidence.

His Call to Arms

After returning to India, Vivekananda called upon the people to believe in their potential strength. He exhorted his countrymen to accept new ideas and scientific knowledge that the modern machine age could offer. He showed the way for nation-building on a sound foundation. In his 1897 Madras speech, "My Plan of Campaign," he exhorted the leaders to cultivate the indispensable virtue of feeling for

the people: "Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of Gods and of sages have become next-door neighbors to brutes [e.g. the British]? Do you feel that millions are starving today and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come

In "The Mission of Vedanta," given the same week, he told the audience: "Ay, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind everyone, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring all the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity to become great and good. Let us proclaim to every soul: Arise, arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him!"

Renewing Hinduism

Past history shows that, in India, religious movement has always preceded national regeneration. Here in India, no national uprising was possible without revitalizing Hinduism, the religion of the majority. Vivekananda did that, and at the same time made it clear that Hinduism and other

religions could remain in harmony and feel themselves as belonging to one nation. His primary role as a religious leader made him the undisputed spiritual father of the Indian freedom movement. His contributions towards Indian nationalism, militant nationalism in particular, included renewed self-esteem and self-confidence, dynamic

over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? If so, that is the first step to becoming a patriot."



ALL PHOTOS: RAMAKRISHNA MISSION KOLKATA

The Ramakrishna Mission, a Global Organization



(above) Belur Mutt, head of the RK Mission; (left) RK Mission school assembly in Rajkot, one of their thousands of educational institutions; (below) Durga puja at the Vedanta Temple in Santa Barbara, California.



spirit, dedication, a call for strength and struggle, love for the country and its people, equal rights, harmony of religions and an emphasis on social uplift and character building through mobilization of the young. Vivekananda urged the Indians to do away with narrow nationalism and to place and judge all problems with an international perspective. He exhorted them to bring reform on national lines and fight for national integration. All these ideas spread widely throughout India, either directly through him, or through his books. Those writings took at times the shape of secret revolutionary literature, copied in hand and circulated amongst the students.

How He Understood the British

Vivekananda's knowledge of world history, coupled with his deep and penetrating intellect and direct experience, made him realize the real nature of British imperialism which, unfortunately, the Indian leaders of his time could not comprehend. Those leaders, though conscious of the occasional lapses of the British rule, thought that on the whole it was beneficial to the people. To many of them the rule was "divine dispensation" and they readily took an oath of allegiance. But Vivekananda considered the British rule as nothing but Satanic, with merciless exploitation as its sole objective. In the following

words of Vivekananda we find rare socio-political insight, couched in poetic diction: "Therefore, the conquest of India by England is not a conquest by Jesus or the Bible as we are often asked to believe, neither is it like the conquest of India by Moguls and the Pathans. But behind the name of the Lord Jesus, the Bible, the magnificent palaces, the heavy tramp of the feet of the armies shaking the earth, the sounds of war trumpets, bugles, the drums, and the splendid display of the royal throne; behind all these, there is always the virtual presence of England—that England whose war flag is the factory chimney, whose troops are the merchant men, whose battle fields are the market places of the world and whose Empress is the gold-studded Goddess of Fortune." The Congress which spearheaded the national struggle afterwards was not the Congress of Vivekananda's time. Vivekananda objected to the "mendicant policy" of that Congress, comprised as it was of toothless petitions and appeals to the British Raj; he urged the nationalists to come down from their high pedestal of intellectual and worldly superiority to the grass-root level and mix with the lowliest of the lowly and share their sufferings; he inspired them for self-organization through man-making education, and to sacrifice their all for the country. The latter-day Congress accepted practically all his programs.

The British Reaction

In relevant historical accounts, secret Government papers, published reports and reminiscences of revolutionary leaders, we find the tremendous influence exerted by Vivekananda on the revolutionary movement. His writings were widely read by the militants. Those were practically their textbooks; recruitments to revolutionary parties were made from the members of the Ramakrishna Mission, and the magic name of Vivekananda was used for this purpose. The government, noticing that many portions of Vivekananda's writings could be used for radical politics, thought of prohibiting the publication of Swamiji's letters and banning the Ramakrishna Mission. This was not surprising, as Vivekananda himself was in his lifetime regarded a suspicious character and was closely watched and harassed. The British Criminal Investigation Department complained at the time that whenever they went to search a revolutionary's house, they found the books of Vivekananda. Here are two extracts from the secret police reports: "... The teachings of the Vedanta Society tend towards Nationalism in politics. Swami Vivekananda himself generally avoided the political side of the case, but by many Hindu Nationalists he is regarded as the Guru of the movement. ... It is obvious that with very little distortion this teaching [of Vivekananda] was a powerful weapon in the hands

In Swami's Own Words: His plan for the education of India

In the same lecture, "The Future of India," Swami Vivekananda makes his case for taking on the education of the masses of India.

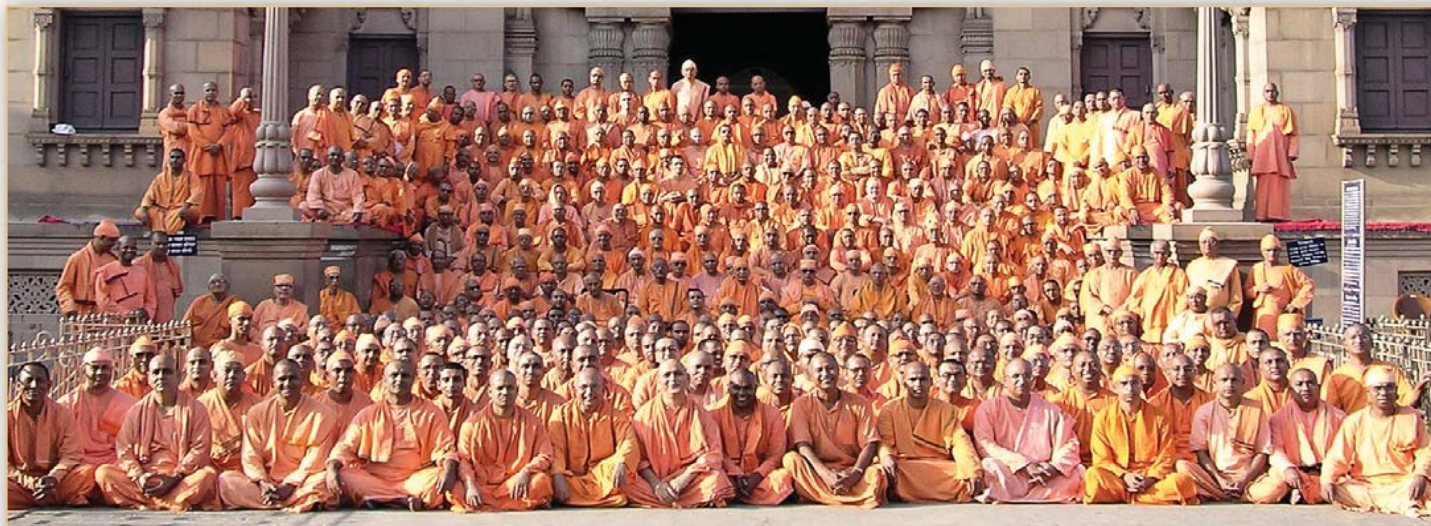
WE MUST HAVE A HOLD ON THE SPIRITUAL AND SECULAR EDUCATION of the nation. Do you understand that? You must dream it, you must talk it, you must think it and you must work it out.

Till then there is no salvation for the race. The education that you are getting now has some good points, but it has a tremendous disadvantage which is so great that the good things are all weighed down. In the first place it is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education or any training that is based on negation, is worse than death. The child is taken to [an English-run] school, and the first thing he learns is that his father is a fool, the second thing that his grandfather is a lunatic, the third thing that all his teachers are hypocrites, the fourth that all the sacred books are lies! By the time he is sixteen he is a mass of negation, lifeless and boneless.

And the result is that fifty years of such education has not produced one original man in the three Presidencies [states of South India]. Every man of originality that has been produced has been educated elsewhere, and not in this country, or they have gone to the old universities once more to cleanse themselves of superstitions. Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library—"The ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of the sandalwood." If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopedias are the Fishis. The ideal, therefore, is that we must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands, and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as practical.



Mission of teaching: In fulfillment of Vivekananda's vision, the Ramakrishna Mission oversees a vast school system



of an idealist revolutionary like Aurobindo Ghosh.... Several passages of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda are pregnant with sedition, that their potentialities for evil have been fully realized and taken advantage of by the revolutionary party, that the various recognized maths are resorted to by political refugees, and that bogus ashramas, which are nothing but centres for the dissemination of revolutionary doctrines, have sprung up with alarming rapidity in eastern Bengal." Subhas Chandra Bose, whom the British considered the most dangerous man in India, and who embodied the entire militant revolutionary spirit of India, wrote time and again that his life was molded under Vivekananda's influence and urged the youth to follow Swamiji's ideal. He said of Vivekananda:

"Reckless in his sacrifice, unceasing in his activity, boundless in his love, profound and versatile in his wisdom, exuberant in his emotions, merciless in his attacks, but yet simple as a child."

Testimony of the Freedom Fighters

Sri Aurobindo wrote in 1916, "Vivekananda was a soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men, but the definitive work he has left behind is quite incommensurate with our impression of his creative might and energy. We perceive his influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, 'Behold, Vive-

kananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children."

In 1949, India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, noted, "I do not know how many of the younger generation read the speeches and the writings of Swami Vivekananda. But I can tell you that many of my generation were very powerfully influenced by him and I think that it would do a great deal of good to the present generation if they also went through Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches, and they would learn much from them." Nehru concluded, "Men like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, men like Swami Vivekananda and men like Mahatma Gandhi are great unifying forces, great constructive geniuses of the world, not only in regard to the particular teachings that they taught, but

their approach to the world; and their conscious and unconscious influence on it is of the most vital importance to us."

THE DIGNITY OF SELFLESS SERVICE

Prof. Long next discusses the legacy of service derived from Vivekananda's teachings, especially as shown in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission.

FOR VIVEKANANDA, SELFLESS SERVICE (*seva*) is the essence of karma yoga. He was among the first Hindu spiritual teachers in the modern era to give *seva* a central place in the spiritual path. Vivekananda and his fellow monks of the Ramakrishna Order were derisively referred to as "scavenger monks" for their work with the poor and the ill in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India. Before this time, the role of a sannyasin was understood by most Hindus to involve a complete withdrawal from the concerns of the world, their main focus being meditation, contemplation and teaching, rather than *seva*. Vivekananda, however, taught his fellow renunciants that they needed to do both. "You must be prepared to explain the difficult intricacies of the shastras now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market. You must be prepared for all menial services." Because of the all-pervasive presence of Brahman, the Divine Ultimate Reality, dwelling within all beings, a practitioner of Vedanta does not distinguish, according to Vivekananda, between "the service of the Lord" and "the service of others." The service

of the Lord is the service of others, and the service of others is the service of the Lord. In Vivekananda's words, "They worship Me best who worship My worshipers. These are all My children, and your privilege is to serve them"—is the teaching of Hindu scriptures."

Empowering the Powerless

Vivekananda's vision of *seva* was not one of mere charity, but was a more radical vision of enabling the self-empowerment of the poor, primarily through education. As Vivekananda writes, "The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality. That is the great task between our people and princes. Up to now nothing has been done in that direction. Priest-power and foreign conquest have trodden them down for centuries, and at last the poor of India have forgotten that they are human beings. They are to be given ideas; their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them; and then they will work out their own salvation. Every nation, every man and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas—that is the only help they require, and then the rest must follow as the effect." This emphasis on self-empowerment was deeply influential upon Mohandas K. Gandhi, who translated it into his concept of *swaraj*, or self-rule. Through Gandhi, Vivekananda's philosophy of service and human empowerment would influence human rights struggles across the globe, including the American Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Ramakrishna Mission

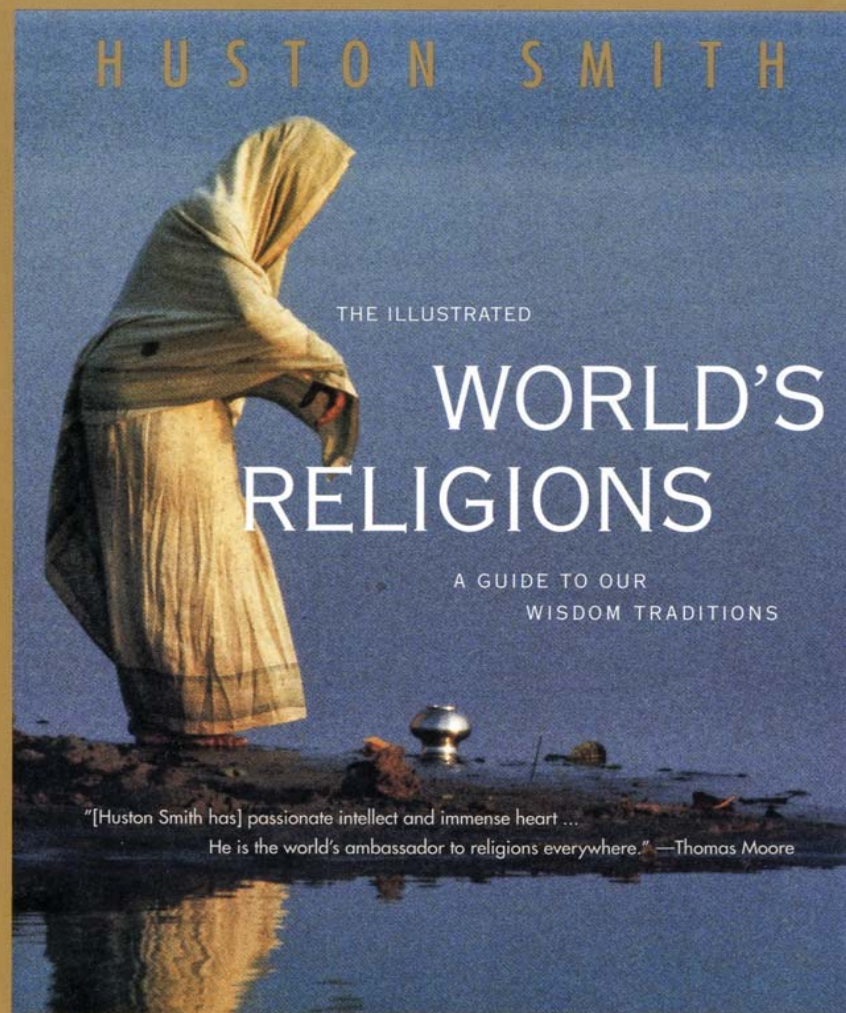
That *seva* was not something that Vivekananda only preached, but put into action himself, is evidenced from the work of the Ramakrishna Mission, which he established in 1897. The relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission is famous, not only in India but beyond India's borders as well, and continues unabated today. Its first relief project began just two weeks after its establishment on May 1, 1897, in the famine-stricken region of Mahula, Murshidabad. Plague relief efforts in Calcutta in 1898 through 1900, famine relief in Madhya Pradesh in 1900, and earthquake relief in Punjab in 1905 followed this effort. And these are only the some of the more high-profile efforts launched early on in the history of the Mission. Building upon these, the Mission is now one of the most widespread and effective relief organizations operating in India, with schools, orphanages and hospitals scattered throughout the region, all organized and maintained by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. Its 1,200 swamis run a vast array of public services. These include 15 hospitals, 130 dispensaries, hundreds of medical camps and various medical schools and colleges, altogether treating over eight million patients just in the period April 2010 to March 2011. Their 1,200 schools handled 330,000 students in the same period, at an expenditure of us\$21 million. They have projects in rural and

Sadhu-led relief efforts



(clockwise from above) A portion of the Ramakrishna Mission's order of more than 1,200 swamis, taken on the steps of Belur Mutt in Kolkata in 2005; Swami Medhasananda, head of the RK Mission of Japan, helping refugees from the 2011 tsunami that devastated the coastline, killed 18,000 people and damaged hundreds of thousands of buildings; delivering food following Cyclone Aila in Bangladesh; handing out mats and other supplies to victims of the 2004 tsunami in Tamil Nadu





tribal areas to improve sanitation, teach better agricultural methods, educate both children and adults and provide medical services. Shortly after Cyclone Aila struck in West Bengal in 2009, killing hundreds and rendering more than a million homeless, they were on the scene. They ran smaller relief programs in nearly every state in India, plus ongoing tsunami rebuilding efforts in Sri Lanka. Frequent religious teaching takes place, often in conjunction with annual festivals and celebrations of the Math and Mission, along with the operation of 211 libraries, various institutes for Sanskrit studies and a major publication program.

SWAMI AND THE INTERFAITH MOVEMENT

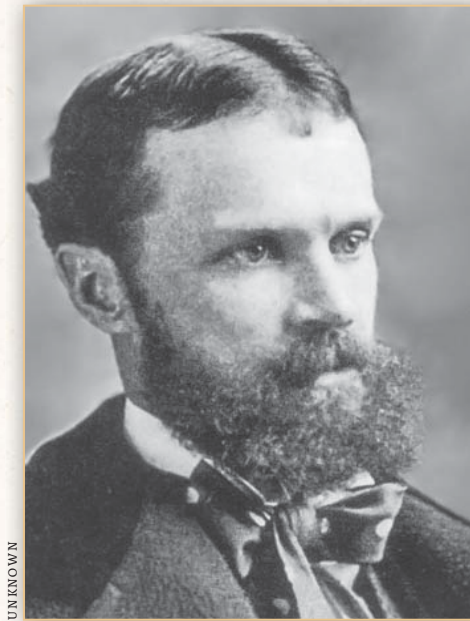
Prof. Long explains how Vivekananda's influence has profoundly shaped the interfaith movement of our times.

AS IT HAS BEEN SAID BY PROF. BASU that Swami Vivekananda was crucial to but not directly involved with India's freedom movement, so it may also be said that while he did not invent interfaith dialogue, he was instrumental in its ideological influence today. The first World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 was the product of a religious progressivism already in place during his time. Vivekananda infused this existing trend with an energy and an intensity that it did not previously have. As a disciple of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda envisioned and embodied interfaith dia-

logue in a way that was far more radical than most conceived it in his time. Even many of the participants in as progressive a body as the World's Parliament of Religions saw the function of interfaith dialogue to be "preparing the way for the reunion of all the world's religions in their true center, Jesus Christ"—the view held by the Catholic Church to this day. Vivekananda resisted such parochialism and proposed, in its place, the idea of the world's religions as "different streams having their sources in different places" that "all mingle their water in the sea" of the shared divinity of all beings.

Replacing Tolerance with Acceptance

Vivekananda envisioned interreligious relations that would go beyond the secular ideal of tolerance, in which practitioners of diverse traditions merely coexist, toward an ideal of acceptance. In a 1900 lecture titled "The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion," Vivekananda draws a stark distinction between the lesser virtue of tolerance—which is certainly preferable to intolerance—and the greater virtue of acceptance. "Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy, and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him."



Impact on Modern Writers

A preeminent advocate of this approach in the twentieth century was philosopher and author Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), a close disciple of Swami Prabhavananda of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, through whom a variety of Vedantic ideas would become part of the countercultural movement of the 1960s, eventually entering the mainstream of American popular consciousness.

Huxley's classic work, *The Perennial Philosophy*, defends the ideal of a harmony of

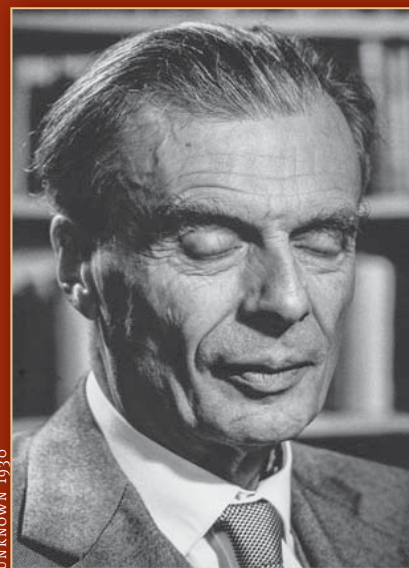
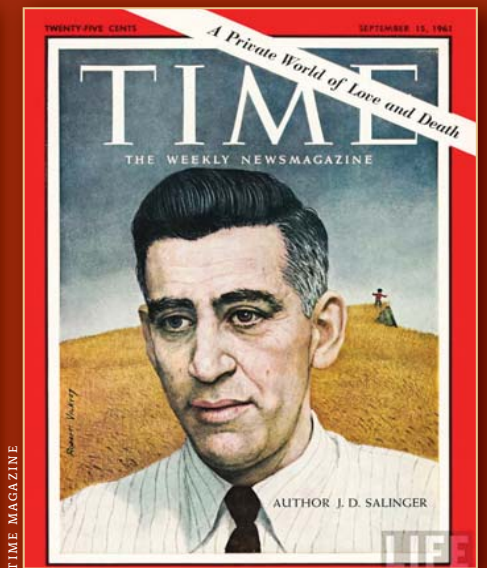
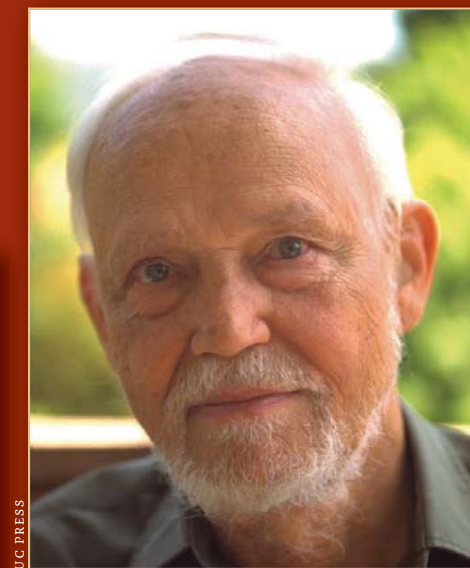
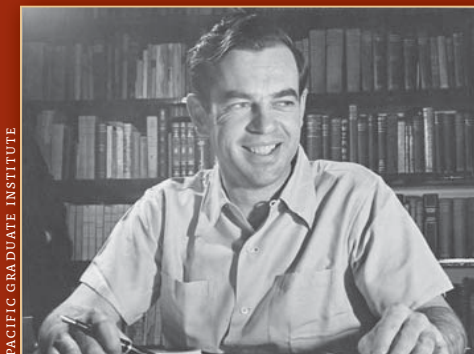
religions by arguing that there is a shared core of experiential wisdom at the heart of all of the world's religious traditions, whose texts he quotes quite liberally to prove the existence of "the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being."

Huxley's approach, known as perennialism, exerted a strong influence on several prominent philosophers, theologians and scholars of religion, including Huston Smith, Joseph Campbell, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and John Hick, through whom this basic principle of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy became disseminated to the wider public in the West. Smith, author of the best-selling book on the world's religions yet published and titled simply, *The Illustrated World's Religions*, probably has done more to shape Western perceptions of the world's religious traditions than any other single scholar. Based for a time at St. Louis University, he had close interactions with Swami Satprakashananda of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, and gradually came to endorse Swami Vivekananda's attitude of universal acceptance toward all religions.

Joseph Campbell was similarly influenced by Vedanta and Huxley's philosophy of perennialism. Becoming a countercultural hero through his popular book on comparative mythology, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell's work, like Smith's, became a

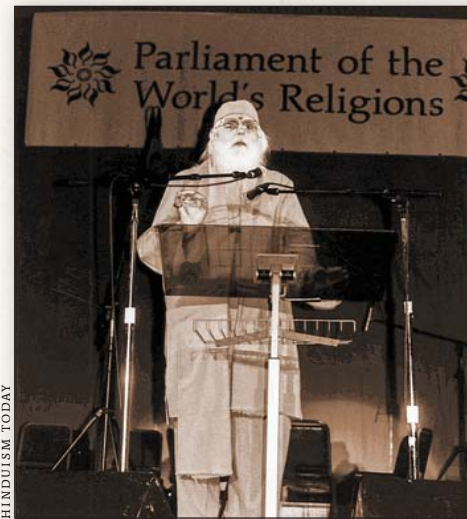
Influence Across the Arts and Sciences

(clockwise from above) psychologist William James, who knew Vivekananda personally and was influenced by his teachings; author J.D. Salinger; historian Huston Smith; scholar Joseph Campbell who, like Smith, promoted an entirely new equality in the understanding of the world's religious and spiritual traditions



(clockwise from top left) Huston Smith's influential book on world religions; three serious students of Vedanta: actress Vivien Leigh, authors Christopher Isherwood and Aldous Huxley

point of entry for many in the West to Vedanta and the thought of Swami Vivekananda. And although known mostly only in academic circles, Islamic scholar and philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr and philosopher of religion John Hick have dedicated much of their professional careers to articulating, in



Nasr's case, an explicit perennialism, and in the case of Hick, a point of view discernibly influenced by perennialism and by the Vedantic concept of a common ultimate reality at the basis of all religious experience. The basic presumption of perennialism is

that all religions share a common core—a perennial philosophy—that unites them all as the pearls on a thread, despite their external differences. It is not a great leap from this considered academic perspective, informed by the Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda, to the results of polls taken in the last few years that indicate 65 percent of Americans believe that “many religions can lead to eternal life,” including a surprising 37 percent of white evangelical Christians. The same survey indicates that 24 percent of Americans believe in the central Hindu doctrine of reincarnation.

AN EVALUATION

At a June, 2003, conference at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's Center for Indic Studies, Prof. Carl T. Jackson of the University of Texas at El Paso offered these insightful summaries of how Swami Vivekananda is seen by scholars today.

SCHOLARS HAVE INCREASINGLY ARGUED that Swami Vivekananda's presentation of Hinduism was not representative of the traditional Hinduism followed by most Hindus in his time or now. He emphasized a universal Hinduism that offered what Aldous Huxley once referred to as the “Highest Common Denominator” for other religions. The Swami formulated a traditional Hindu idea

from the view of Advaita Vedanta, ignoring the worship of many Gods, elaborate rituals and observances of popular Hinduism as practiced by most Hindus. Critical of the Swami's interpretation of Hinduism, the scholars seem to agree, even a hundred years later, that Swami Vivekananda has exercised immense influence on our modern conception of Hinduism—though not always for the good. Richard King thus declares that thanks to the influence of Swami Vivekananda, and the later writings of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Western Orientalists, “Advaita Vedanta in its modern form (often called neo-Vedanta, or more accurately, neo-Advaita) has become a dominant force in Indian intellectual thought.” That is, because of Vivekananda's persuasive and widely influential interpretation of Hinduism from the perspective of Advaita Vedanta, Indian religion—both in India and in the West—has come to be seen largely as a religion with a neo-Vedantic message. Unfortunately, for these scholars, this represents a distortion of Hinduism as practiced.

Even as these scholars object to Swami Vivekananda's interpretations of Hinduism, they also testify to his importance and lasting influence in our understanding of Hinduism today. Keeping in mind the continuing volume of works devoted to his life and teachings, if anything, Swami Vivekananda seems an even larger figure in the history of India and of Hinduism today than a hundred years ago.

IN CONCLUSION

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S INFLUENCE ON our world today, says Prof. Long, and in the West in particular, is almost impossible to calculate. His philosophy of religious pluralism, proclaimed in his first address to the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, developed in his later lectures, and drawn from the teaching and example of his master, Sri Ramakrishna, energized the interfaith movement of his time and, through the influence of the Vedanta Society and the Western intellectuals who were drawn to it, shaped mainstream American views on religious diversity.

The teaching and life of his master, Sri Ramakrishna, would likely be unknown in the Western world but for Vivekananda's global travels. The floodgates that he opened, leading to the coming of a variety of Hindu spiritual teachers to the West, made a range of Hindu beliefs, practices and imagery far more familiar in America than is otherwise conceivable. His philosophy of selfless service led to the emergence of the massive education and relief efforts in India of the Ramakrishna Mission. His impassioned patriotic calls to all Indians made a profound impression on the mind of Mahatma Gandhi and numerous other leaders across the spectrum of India's independence movement.

Swami Vivekananda was instrumental in making Hinduism into a tradition with a global following, not confined to India or to persons of Indian descent. In deciding to emphasize only one facet of the religion, Advaita Vedanta, he formed an opening wedge for bringing Hinduism into Western mainstream thought, and preparing the West for the arrival, one hundred years later, of a more convoluted and theistic form of the faith. As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of his birth, we cannot but stand in awe of his incredible legacy, a legacy whose full implications may have yet to be felt in the as-yet-unforeseen future.

Connections: Vivekananda's Early Influence on Hinduism Today's Gurus

The recently published book, The Guru Chronicles, details the life of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and his guru, Siva Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Swami Vivekananda impacted both their lives, the latter in person in 1897 and the former through his books, as described in the following excerpts:

WHILE YOGANATHAN [AS YOGASWAMI WAS ORIGINALLY NAMED] was employed at Iranamadu, Sri Lanka, in 1897, a crucial event occurred that nurtured his inclinations to renounce the world. Ratna Ma Navaratnam wrote in a biography: “At about this time, the triumphant return of Swami Vivekananda from the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago created a stir in the hearts of the people enticed by alien culture, and his visit to Ceylon was acclaimed as a happy augury for the renewal of faith in Hinduism. The prophet of the New Age came to Yalpanam in 1897, and his elevating lectures at Hindu College, the Esplanade and the Saiva Pathashala at Columbuthurai made an undying impression on Swami.” It is reported that when Swami Vivekananda was ceremoniously brought in a carriage drawn by the leading Hindu citizens to address the public at the present Hindu Maha Vidyalaya at Columbuthurai [near Jaffna], he got down from the carriage at a junction where stands an illupai tree and walked to the school from there. In his lecture, he reported that he was impelled to get down from the carriage, as he felt he was treading on sanctified soil and called that spot, prophetically, an oasis. This was the illupai tree [art at right] under whose shade Swami would later sit in the sun and rain during his sadhana years. Columbuthurai was singled out as an attractive oasis when Swami in later years, too, hallowed this spot as his religious centre and ashram. Inthumathy Amma, a contemporary of Yogaswami, adds to the chronicle: “When Yogaswami was working in Kilinochchi, Swami Vivekananda's visit to Ceylon took place (1897). Yogaswami participated in the reception that Jaffna accorded to him with great enthusiasm. Yogaswami also took part in the procession from the Fort to Hindu

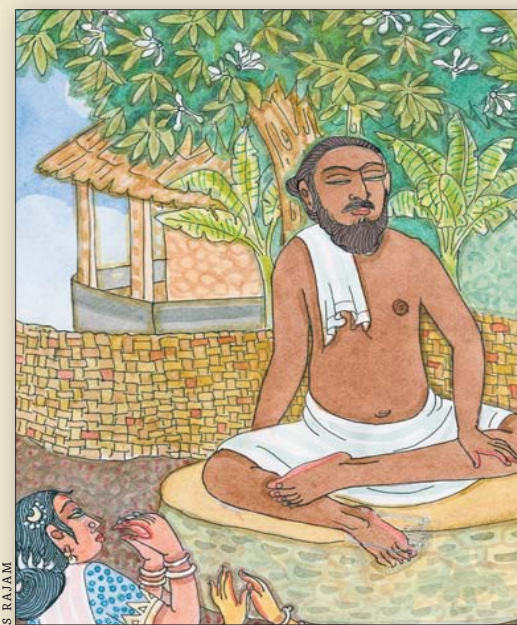
College, and later in the public meeting held at the Hindu College premises. The eagerness with which Yogaswami later spoke of the topics discussed by Swami Vivekananda in those early days showed the great latent desire he had for the company of saints.”

In the 1920s and 30s several professional men drew near, whom Yogaswami endearingly called “The Most Distinguished and Learned Council of Rogues.” He met with this devout and educated group—teachers, lawyers, doctors and businessmen—roughly once a week at one of the members' large homes. He sometimes spoke of Swami Vivekananda at these gatherings. He described the young swami, whose lectures he had attended in January 1897, as like a lion roaring, pacing up and down the platform, barely able to express all his percep-

tions and direct all the energies coming through him. At the outset of his talk, the 34-year-old Vedanta monk had lamented, “The time is short, and the subject is vast.” Swami reiterated that saying throughout his life. He would also read from the books of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo to devotees at his Columbuthurai ashram.

Yogaswami's successor, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, was the lead dancer of the San Francisco Ballet Company when in 1947, at the height of his career, only nineteen years old, he walked away, never to return. He later said of that moment: “Right at the top of my dance career, I followed the advice of really professional people who said, ‘You should stop when you're on the top of your career.’ I was sent by one of my teachers to Sri Lanka to find my guru, because I was very anxious to find my guru. I was deep in the study of all of Vivekananda's teachings. I was listening to lectures at the Vedanta Society and meeting the swamis there and meet-

ing Paramahansa Yogananda. I didn't find my guru in any of them.” His search for his guru took him across the seas on a merchant ship to India and by train to South India where he caught a ferry to Ceylon, arriving in Colombo in March of 1947. Two years later, having been initiated by Siva Yogaswami, he returned to America and founded, among other things, this magazine: HINDUISM TODAY.



Interfaith, a lasting legacy



(top) Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago; (below) an interfaith gathering held in conjunction with the G-8 world economic conference—one indication of how popular the concept of interfaith meetings has become

The Ideal of Universal Religion

Excerpts from a talk by Swami Vivekananda in which he offers that yoga is the essential unity that underlies the the world's diverse faiths

BY SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

WHAT THEN DO I MEAN BY THE IDEAL OF A universal religion? I do not mean any one universal philosophy, or any one universal mythology, or any one universal ritual held alike by all; for I know that this world must go on working, wheel within wheel, this intricate mass of machinery, most complex, most wonderful. What can we do then? We can make it run smoothly, we can lessen the friction, we can grease the wheels, as it were. How? By recognizing the natural necessity of variation. Just as we have recognized unity by our very nature, so we must also recognise variation. We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways, and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes. We must learn that the same thing can be viewed from a hundred different standpoints, and yet be the same thing.

Hundreds of attempts have been made in India, in Alexandria, in Europe, in China, in Japan, in Tibet, and lastly in America, to formulate a harmonious religious creed, to make all religions come together in love. They have all failed, because they did not adopt any practical plan. I have also my little plan. I do not know whether it will work or not, and I want to present it to you for discussion. What is my plan? In the first place I would ask mankind to recognise this maxim, "Do not destroy." Iconoclastic reformers do no good to the world. Secondly, take man where he stands, and from there give him a lift. If it be true that God is the centre of all religions, and that each of us is moving towards Him along one of these radii, then it is certain that all of us must reach that center. And at the center, where all the radii meet, all our differences will cease; but until we reach there, differences there must be.

There are thousands and thousands of varieties of minds and inclinations. A thorough generalization of them is impossible, but for our practical purpose it is sufficient to have them characterized into four classes. First, there is the active man, the worker; he wants to work, and there is tremendous energy in his muscles and his nerves. His aim is to work—to build hospitals, do charitable deeds, make streets, to plan and to organise. Then there is the emotional man, who loves the sublime and the beautiful to an excessive degree. He loves to think of the beautiful, to enjoy the aesthetic side of nature, and adore Love and the God of Love. Then, there is the mystic, whose mind wants to analyze its own self, to understand the workings of the human mind, what the forces are that are working inside, and how to know, manipulate and obtain control over them. Then, there is the philosopher who wants to weigh everything and use his intellect even beyond the possibilities of all human philosophy.

To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions is my ideal of religion. And this religion is attained by what we, in India, call Yoga—union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole



of humanity; to the mystic, between his lower and Higher Self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of Love; and to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by Yoga. The man who seeks after this kind of union is called a Yogi. The worker is called the Karma Yogi. He who seeks the union through love is called the Bhakti Yogi. He who seeks it through mysticism is called the Raja Yogi. And he who seeks it through philosophy is called the Jnana Yogi. So, this word Yogi comprises them all.

Now first of all let me take up Raja Yoga. What is this Raja Yoga, this controlling of the mind? In the present state of our body we are so much distracted, and the mind is frittering away its energies upon a hundred sorts of things. As soon as I try to calm my thoughts and concentrate my mind

upon any one object of knowledge, thousands of undesired impulses rush into the brain, thousands of thoughts rush into the mind and disturb it. How to check it and bring the mind under control is the whole subject of study in Raja Yoga.

Now take Karma Yoga, the attainment of God through work. Karma Yoga teaches us how to work for work's sake, unattached, without caring who is helped, and what for.

There is then the Bhakti Yoga for the man of emotional nature, the lover. Bhakti Yoga teaches them how to love, without any ulterior motives, loving God and loving the good because it is good to do so, not for going to heaven, nor to get children, wealth or anything else. It teaches them that love itself is the highest recompense of love—that God Himself is love.

We lastly come to the Jnana Yogi, the philosopher, the thinker, he who wants to go beyond the visible. His soul wants to go beyond all that into the very heart of being, by seeing Reality as It is; by realizing It, by being It, by becoming one with that Universal Being. That is the philosopher. This is what this Jnana Yoga teaches. It tells man that he is essentially divine. It shows to mankind the real unity of being, and that each one of us is the Lord God Himself, manifested on earth. All of us—from the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the highest beings to whom we look up with wonder and awe—all are manifestations of the same Lord.

Lastly, it is imperative that all these various Yogas should be carried out in practice; mere theories about them will not do any good. Religion is realization; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion.

Swami Vivekananda gave the lecture "The Ideal of Universal Religion" in New York on January 12, 1896.

Vivekananda's Quantum Leap

His understanding of matter and energy anticipated the discovery of the quantum—key to the inevitable merger of modern science with spirituality

BY JAY LAKHANI

SINCE CHILDHOOD, THE ASPECT OF RELIGION that attracted me most was its experiential side. Its narratives or liturgy had limited attraction for me. The religious personalities that captured my attention were those whose lives were guided by first-hand spiritual experiences, such as Ramana Maharshi and Sri Ramakrishna.

At the age of 17 I joined Imperial College in London to study physics. At the same time I came across the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. In the mornings I was exposed to the teachings of the most physical of physical sciences, and in the evenings I immersed myself in the spiritual stream that flows from the lectures of Vivekananda. During that period, many a day and night were filled with intense spiritual experiences. By the grace of my mentor, spiritual truths were no longer a matter of belief or intellectual acceptance; they became a reality for me. It was a real struggle to keep attending lectures focused on material science, but I persevered, and even went on to do a masters degree in quantum physics.

One of the greatest divides we face in this century is that between science and spirituality. On one side sits not one, but a multitude of religious world views; on the other side sits a more unified, science-oriented, rationally-founded worldview. A reconciliation is crucial, else the marvelous discoveries at the heart of all religions are in danger of being snuffed out by the far more popular human enterprise—science.

For a rationalist, the first issue is: "How can all religions be right?" They talk of different Gods or sometimes of no God. Either one religion is right, and the rest are in error, or quite likely the whole lot are in error! Vivekananda reconciled this disjoint in his address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. He suggested that at the experiential level all prophets encountered the same spirit, but a variation takes place when they try to give expression to their spiritual experiences. This variation is inevitable because it reflects a variation in the mindsets of different cultures in different historic periods. Over time, each expression ossifies into a religion or a different sect within the same religion. It is not that one is right and the rest are wrong—they are various attempts to infuse spirituality in greater society. This insight is popularly called religious pluralism. Religious pluralism recognizes variation in spiritual expressions and challenges exclusivist claims made by any religion.

Since the time of Vivekananda's famous speech, religious pluralism has entered the social vocabulary. Recent surveys show that a large percentage of even evangelical Christians are comfortable with the concept of pluralism—and one of the main Shia Muslim groups in London recently published my article on pluralism on the front page of its publication! Without much drum beating or fanfare, pluralism has gently entered public consciousness.



The majority of youngsters I interact with at schools and colleges do not like to be called religious; they see themselves as being spiritual. When asked to explain what they mean by spiritual, they struggle, because it is difficult to intellectualize something that they feel is essentially intuitive. Most of them like humanism, but not necessarily the materialistic humanism promoted by the likes of Richard Dawkins. Without realizing, what they are actually attracted to is the spiritual humanism that Vivekananda promoted so strongly. Materialistic humanists see humanity as the extension of the material kingdom, while spiritual humanists see themselves as spiritual beings on a material journey.

I am making a robust attempt to reconcile the cutting-edge discoveries of modern science with the esoteric concepts at the heart of Hinduism. In the process I am challenging the paradigm of materialism. I offer well-received talks on this theme at various universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. I make no secret that the relevant and engaging material I bring out in my talks comes straight out of the *Complete Works*.

Let me just touch on one such notion that exhibits a clear link between science and spirituality and challenges materialism. At the heart of physics sits a marvelous discovery called the quantum. When it comes to understanding the fabric of reality, physics cannot do without the quantum. This discovery is far more relevant than all the other discoveries of science rolled together. It offers rigorous mathematical articulation of everything, from the workings of the computer chip to the structure of DNA. And yet, conceptually the same phenomenon remains a mystery. The reason why it so intriguing is because it insists that the underpinning to the world of matter scientists are so fixated on is essentially nonmaterial.

To get a conceptual grasp of the quantum we have to refer to one of the talks by Vivekananda on raja yoga. In this talk he said that the whole creation can be explained in terms of just two entities! The first is all penetrating existence (akash) and the second entity is a shudder in existence (prana). He gave this talk in 1895 when quantum was unheard of. Quantum physics insists that the world we see and experience as the empirical universe is not an objective reality but a multitude of wiggles in existence. I tell the physicists that the only way they can appreciate quantum is by giving up their fixation on matter and their attempt to explain the world in material terms. Science has entered a new phase, where matter has been severely demoted—in fact, it is valued as a mere appearance. Adi Shankara and Vivekananda must be smiling! A major paradigm shift is in the making—a shift that will merge science into spirituality.

JAY LAKHANI is Director of the Vivekananda Centre, London, and Education Director of the Hindu Council UK.



HEALTH

“Diabetesity:” A Modern Pandemic

A shift toward sugared foods and less physical activity has caused a steady rise in obesity and diabetes, leading to the greatest health crisis of our time

WORLD HEALTH IS IN A DOWNWARD spiral as diabetes and cardiovascular disease rates soar. According to the International Diabetes Federation, India (after China) is home to the second largest number of diabetics in the world: 61.3 million. By 2030, that number will almost double to an estimated 101.2 million. The American Diabetes Association counted 25.8 million children and adults (8.3 percent of the population) with the disease in 2011. Another 79 million Americans are prediabetic. The ADA’s 2012 fact sheet projects that one in three American adults will have diabetes in 2050. That is merely a sampling of the burgeoning facts and figures that tell a grim tale of a disease that seems to be on a march to take over the world.

What is diabetes?
Dr. Francine R. Kaufman, head of the Center for Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, explains in her best-selling book *Diabetesity: The Obesity-Diabetes Epidemic that Threatens America*, “Diabetes can devastate nearly every system of the body, but it all starts with the metabolism of glucose, a type of sugar. Glucose is what fuels our every move and our every thought. The glucose we need comes from the food we eat. But our body can’t use

it without insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas.”

Diabetes comes in two forms. In type 1, the immune system destroys the special cells in the pancreas, called beta cells, that are responsible for producing insulin. Dr. Kaufman explains, “Type 1 diabetes typically appears in childhood and progresses rapidly. Fortunately, type 1 is relatively rare. Ninety percent of people with diabetes have the other kind, which is known as type 2. In type 2 diabetes, the key problem is not that insulin is lacking; rather, the body’s cells don’t respond normal-

“If we could prevent obesity, type 2 diabetes would become rare.”

Francine R. Kaufman, M.D., in *Diabetesity*

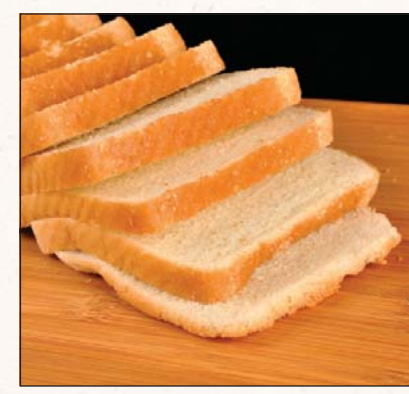
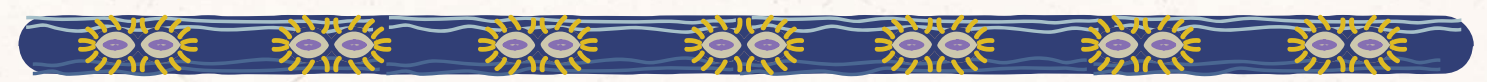
ly to it. As with type 1, the cells go hungry while, paradoxically, glucose accumulates in the blood.”

Type 1 diabetes is treatable with insulin injections, but can’t be cured. Dr. Kaufman writes, “Type 2 is different, because it’s strongly associated with excess weight. Simply by maintaining a healthy weight, people can significantly cut their risk of developing this terrible disease. What’s more, they can even cure it at its early stages if they achieve and maintain a normal weight.”

This connection with weight is the key. A joint statement from the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association begins: “The steady gain in the prevalence of obesity over the last 25 years has affected our entire population—no racial or ethnic group, no region of the country, and no socioeconomic group has been spared. Perhaps most worrisome is the observation that the rise in the rate of obesity has been greatest in children and minorities, which suggests that future generations of Americans, and our fastest growing populations, may bear the ultimate burden of this condition.”

“Overweight or obesity results in a wide range of elevated risk factors and many fatal and nonfatal conditions. Paradoxically, although we have witnessed decades in which heart disease and stroke have steadily declined and cancer mortality has at worst remained stable, the prevalence of diabetes has soared. The increase in diabetes can largely be attributed to weight gain, and it threatens the enormous advances in disease prevention we have seen.”

Fully 80 percent of people with diabetes are overweight or obese. Dr. Kaufman explains that experts became alarmed by the parallel increase in obesity and diabetes that became apparent in the 1990s and began referring to them as a single problem. They



ALL IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

called it “diabetesity.”

Excess weight around the midsection makes the disease more likely, but that’s not all. Dr. Kaufman elucidates, “Approximately one-third of obese adults, and perhaps as many overweight teenagers, have metabolic syndrome, which is also called syndrome X or insulin resistance syndrome.” Metabolic syndrome names a constellation of risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular disease: high blood sugar, high waist circumference, high blood pressure, high levels of triglycerides and low levels of HDL, the good cholesterol.

The condition called prediabetes is commonly referred to more specifically by the term *insulin resistance*, describing the inability of cells to respond properly to insulin. This forms the cornerstone of type 2 diabetes, and it seems that it is caused directly by excess fat.

HINDUISM TODAY asked Dr. Vinaya Simha, an endocrinologist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, to elaborate: “Normally there is little to no fat in liver and muscle cells. With obesity, when the fat storing capacity of all fat cells is exhausted, then the muscle and liver cells also take up fat. Toxic products from the metabolism of triglycerides (the building blocks of fats) have been shown to interfere with insulin signaling in these cells, leading to insulin resistance. Obesity also imposes additional loads on the pancreatic beta cells.”

What is making us fat?

The simple answer: our food—specifically,

the amount of sugar in foods and the quantity of refined starches most people are consuming as dietary staples.

Since the mass production of high-fructose corn syrup began in the mid 70s, sweetener consumption in the US has almost doubled, while the population has increased only 40% (see sidebar, next page). Most has come in the form of soft drinks. Dr. Simha comments, “The introduction of sugary beverages has closely paralleled the steep rise in obesity and associated metabolic complications. Most people simply don’t realize the amount of sugar in these beverages. A 20-ounce bottle of regular soda has 17 teaspoons of sugar!” That’s 255 calories, or 13% of the recommended 2,000 calories a typical healthy person engaged in a normal level of physical activity should consume per day from all food and drinks.

According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Americans consume an average of 577 12-ounce sodas per person per year. That is almost six times the consumption recorded in the 1940s. In CSPI’s 2005 report titled “Liquid Candy: How Soft Drinks Are Harming Americans’ Health,” Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D. announced that carbonated soft drinks are the single biggest source of calories in the American diet.

Dr. Jacobson explains that soft drinks are a problem not only for what they contain, but for what they push out of the diet. When people consume large amounts of soda, they generally eat less foods that are important sources of vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber.

It’s all sugar: In tea and sweets, in white rice and flour products, no matter the form or color, glucose enters our bodies, spikes our blood sugar and puts on weight, time after time. The biggest culprit is soda.

Soda pop is not the only culprit. Most doctors and scientists have begun using the blanket term “sugary beverages,” which includes sodas, sports beverages, sweetened coffee, the sugary tea that is so common in the Indian diet—and even fruit juice.

How could fruit juice be bad? Fruit juice has the same basic composition as the other beverages on the list: it is mostly sugar and water. According to Dr. Robert Lustig, a pediatric endocrinologist at the University of California at San Francisco, the sugar in fruit juice and the high fructose corn syrup added to sweetened drinks are made up of and broken down by the body into the same two components: glucose and fructose. But juice has more sugar per ounce: eight ounces of juice has about 120 calories, while the same size soda has 100.

Dr. Lustig made the bold claim that sugar is poison in a 2009 lecture he called “Sugar: The Bitter Truth” (on YouTube: bit.ly/sugar-bitter-truth). This has been the subject of some controversy and only in 2012 began to reach the mainstream media, including a special CNN report by Dr. Sanjay Gupta called “Is Sugar Toxic?” and the comprehensive series “The Weight of the Nation” by HBO Documentaries. In an interview

printed by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on March 22, 2012, Dr. Lustig explained, “Our bodies are not equipped to consume lots of fructose. Glucose, which is found in bread, pasta, rice and potatoes, can be metabolized by all the body’s digestive organs. Fructose can only be metabolized by the liver. If you overwhelm the body with fructose, the liver can’t convert it to energy fast enough. The liver converts it to fat. The goal is to not over-fructosify your liver, but fruit juice does that.”

Dr. Lee A. Evslin, a pediatrician and wellness consultant in Kapaa, Hawaii, expanded on Dr. Lustig’s findings: “There are studies that have shown that when fruit juice is given to what are referred to as the WIC populations (women, infants and children), the obesity rate in most children rose right along with the consumption of the fruit juices.”

Addressing Dr. Lustig’s program for overweight children at UCSF, Dr. Evslin relates: “No liquid sugar. That’s number one. That means no juice, no soda—no carbohydrates without fiber. What they’re talking about is that fruit is high in fructose, but it has fiber in it, and apparently the amount of fiber and the way that fructose is released from its fiber backbone slows it down enough that the body can handle it. It seems to be the rapid absorption of fructose that leads to the liver

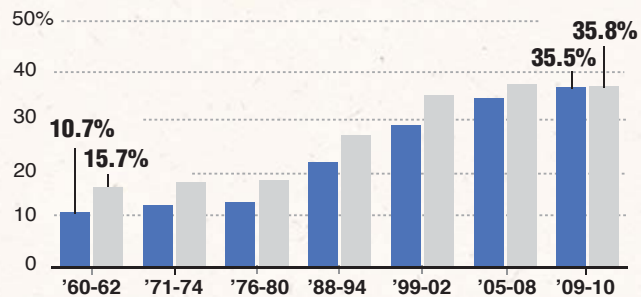
Tracking a health problem

U.S. obesity rates have climbed for men and boys and stabilized for women and girls.

Adult obesity rates

Age 20 and older

■ Men ■ Women

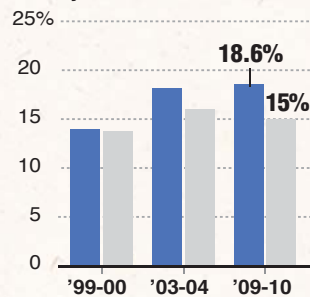


NOTE: Obesity is defined in children and teens as being at/above the 95th percentile of body mass index for age growth charts. Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Graphic: Los Angeles Times

Child and teen obesity rates

2 to 19 years of age

■ Boys ■ Girls



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being overwhelmed.” When you eat the whole fruit, something different happens.

Many of the solid foods people eat today are filled with processed grain products. Dr. Evslin explains: “It is increasingly obvious to anybody looking at the nutrition of the world that everywhere processed food goes, ill-health follows. The shame of our processed food industry is that we’ve narrowed our food choices down to wheat, corn, sugar

and soy. We’ve gone from hundreds of varieties of foods that humans were initially exposed to down to these very few, many of them devoid of nutrients because of the depleted soil they’re grown in. We’re giving people fewer and fewer choices.” Think about the typical daily diet: cereal and toast for breakfast, a sandwich for lunch and most likely rice, pasta, potatoes and other starches dominating the dinner plate. That’s a lot of

refined carbohydrates and little fiber.

The problem with all those extra calories from the sweetened beverages and starchy meals is that it adds up to far more than the average person engaging in a typical amount of physical activity requires in a day. Where do all those extra calories go? They get converted to fat and stored. Remember what Dr. Simha said happens when fat cells get overstuffed and fat begins to collect in the liver: insulin resistance ensues and type 2 diabetes follows.

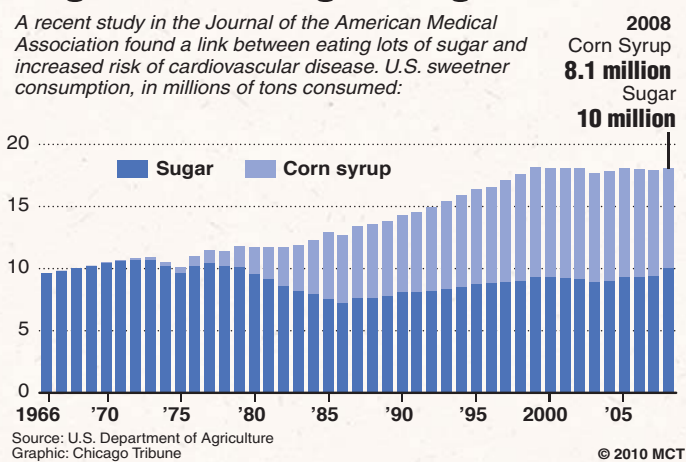
The editors of this publication have heard an unfortunate number of Hindus talk in terms of “when” they will get diabetes, not

“if.” But people don’t need to get diabetes. If they understood the numerous dire consequences of extra weight and excess sugar in the blood over time and how simple it is to live healthfully, perhaps they would do so.

Dr. Kaufman writes that diabetes is the sixth leading cause of death in the US and that it increases the risk for heart disease six-fold and multiplies the risk of stroke by four. “Diabetes raises cardiac risk because of a pro-

Sugar intake a growing concern

A recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found a link between eating lots of sugar and increased risk of cardiovascular disease. U.S. sweetener consumption, in millions of tons consumed:



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cess called glycation. Insulin is not required for glucose to enter the cells of the nervous system, including the brain; nor is it needed to allow glucose into red blood cells or into the endothelial cells that line the blood vessels. When too much sugar is circulating in the blood, some of the excess attaches to proteins and molecules in the red blood cells and endothelial cells—this is glycation. The destructive effects of glycation are similar

to what happens to fruit as it ripens: first it becomes sweeter and sweeter, then at some point it begins to deteriorate and rot.

“Chronic high blood sugar causes inflammation in the large blood vessels of the heart and brain. Glycation swells the endothelial cells that line the blood vessels. Over time, blood flow to vital organs becomes impaired.” In addition to bringing about heart attacks and strokes, in the US these vascular effects of diabetes annually cause 24,000 people to go blind, 28,000 to end up in kidney failure and 82,000 to require an amputation, losing a toe, a foot or even a leg.

Daily life with diabetes is no walk in the park. “Diabetes never takes a vacation and never gives anyone a break. By the time one shot is finished or one pill is taken, it’s time to prepare for the next. When one blood test is completed, the next one must be anticipated. Each meal or snack requires thought. Some diseases are worse than diabetes. But none requires such a complex balancing act, where patients must do so much themselves. When you’re diagnosed with dia-

Why Our Food Is Making Us Fat

An excerpt of the exposé by Jacques Peretti printed in the June 11, 2012, edition of *The Guardian*. The full article may be viewed at bit.ly/peretti-sugar.

THE STORY BEGINS IN 1971. RICHARD NIXON WAS FACING RE-election. The Vietnam war was threatening his popularity at home, but just as big an issue with voters was the soaring cost of food. If Nixon was to survive, he needed food prices to go down, and that required getting a very powerful lobby on board—the farmers. Nixon appointed Earl Butz, an academic from the farming heartland of Indiana, to broker a compromise. Butz, an agriculture expert, had a radical plan that would transform the food we eat, and in doing so, the shape of the human race.

Butz pushed farmers into a new, industrial scale of production, and into farming one crop in particular: corn. Corn became the engine for the massive surge in the quantities of cheaper food being supplied to American supermarkets: everything from cereals, to biscuits and flour found new uses for corn. As a result of Butz’s free-market reforms, American farmers, almost overnight, went from parochial small-holders to multimillionaire businessmen with a global market.

By the mid-70s, there was a surplus of corn. Butz flew to Japan to look into a scientific innovation that would change everything: the mass development of high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), or glucose-fructose syrup as it’s often referred to in the UK, a highly sweet, gloppy syrup, produced from surplus corn, that was also incredibly cheap. HFCS had been discovered in the 50s, but it was only in the 70s that a process had been found to harness it for

mass production. HFCS was soon pumped into every conceivable food: pizzas, coleslaw, meat. It provided that “just baked” sheen on bread and cakes, made everything sweeter, and extended shelf life from days to years. A silent revolution of the amount of sugar that was going into our bodies was taking place.

There was one product in particular that it had a dramatic effect on—soft drinks. Hank Cardello, the former head of marketing at Coca-Cola, tells me that in 1984, Coke in the US swapped from sugar to HFCS (in the UK, it continued to use sugar). As a market leader, Coke’s decision sent a message of endorsement to the rest of the industry, which quickly followed suit. There was “no downside” to HFCS, Cardello says. It was two-thirds the price of sugar, and even the risk of messing with the taste was a risk worth taking when you looked at the margin, especially as there were no apparent health risks. At that time, “obesity wasn’t even on the radar,” says Cardello.

But another health issue was on the radar: heart disease, and in the mid-70s, a fierce debate was raging behind the closed doors of academia over what was causing it. An American nutritionist called Ancel Keys blamed fat, while a British researcher at the University of London, Professor John Yudkin, blamed sugar. But Yudkin’s work was rubbished by what many, including Professor Robert Lustig, one of the world’s leading endocrinologists, believe was a concerted campaign to discredit Yudkin. Much of the criticism came from fellow academics, whose research was aligning far more closely with the direction the food industry was intending to take. Yudkin’s colleague at the time, Dr. Richard Bruckdorfer at UCL says: “There was a huge lobby from [the

food] industry, particularly from the sugar industry, and Yudkin complained bitterly that they were subverting some of his ideas.” Yudkin was, Lustig says simply, “thrown under the bus,” because there was a huge financial gain to be made by fingering fat, not sugar, as the culprit of heart disease.

The food industry had its eyes on the creation of a new genre of food, something they knew the public would embrace with huge enthusiasm, believing it to be better for their health—“low fat.” It promised an immense business opportunity forged from the potential disaster of heart disease. But, says Lustig, there was a problem. “When you take the fat out of a recipe, food tastes like cardboard, and you need to replace it with something—that something being sugar.”

Overnight, new products arrived on the shelves that seemed too good to be true. Low-fat yoghurts, spreads, even desserts and biscuits. All with the fat taken out, and replaced with sugar. Britain was one of the most enthusiastic adopters of what food writer Gary Taubes, author of *Why We Get Fat*, calls “the low-fat dogma,” with sales rocketing.

By the mid-80s, health experts such as Professor Philip James, a world-renowned British scientist who was one of the first to identify obesity as an issue, were noticing that people were getting fatter and no one could explain why. The food industry was keen to point out that individuals must be responsible for their own calorie consumption, but even those



The bitter truth: Dr. Robert Lustig (left) of the University of California at San Francisco postulates that sugar is a poison when consumed in the quantities commonly found today in soft drinks, juices and refined products of all kinds

who exercised and ate low-fat products were gaining weight. In 1966 the proportion of people [in the UK] with a BMI of over 30 (classified as obese) was just 1.2% for men and 1.8% for women. By 1989 the figures had risen to 10.6% for men and 14.0% for women. And no one was joining the dots between HFCS and fat.

"People with an 'apple' shape—those with excess weight concentrated in their midsection—are especially likely to have invisible visceral fat inside the abdominal cavity and around the liver and other organs. As a result, individuals with this body type are at much greater risk for diabetes and other serious health problems. Nearly everyone diagnosed with type 2 diabetes has weighed too much for years."

Francine R. Kaufman, M.D.

SHUTTERSTOCK

betes, the disease infiltrates every moment and clouds the future," laments Dr. Kaufman.

The economic costs of diabetes are nothing short of phenomenal. The ADA reports that people with diabetes, on average, have medical expenses 23 times higher than those without diabetes and that approximately one in ten health care dollars can be attributed to the disease. The US spends an estimated \$2 trillion on health care every year. Do the math.

What can you do?

"The most important thing is to avoid weight gain," Dr. Simha offers. Studies have concluded that weight reduction not only decreases risk of diabetes dramatically but is more effective than medication for type 2 diabetics, and should thus be the focus of intervention.

"One should be especially mindful of the lower cutoffs for ideal body weight in Asians," Dr. Simha adds. What he is referring to is the Body Mass Index (BMI), an estimate of body fat composition calculated by dividing weight (kg) by the square of height (m²), and the recent findings that Asians develop diabetes at lower ranges of BMI than other populations. Currently a BMI of 30 kg/m² or higher is considered the definition of obesity. An August 2011 article in *Diabetes Care* reads, "For the equivalent incidence rate of diabetes at a BMI of 30 kg/m² in white subjects, the BMI cutoff value was 24 kg/m² in South Asian, 25 kg/m² in Chinese, and 26 kg/m² in black subjects." To find out your BMI, enter your height and

weight into the tool at bit.ly/mayo-bmi.

Dr. Evslin offers this simple dietary program for a healthy weight: "No liquid sugar; no carbohydrates without fiber." That means no sodas, juices, sweetened tea or coffee, white rice and white flour (the processing has removed the fiber) and no packaged foods, which are mostly composed of refined corn and wheat. "Returning to real, unsweetened foods, trying to get five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables a day is important," he advises. The American Heart Association recommends limiting the daily amount of added sugars to no more than 100 calories or six teaspoons of sugar for women and 150 calories or nine teaspoons of sugar for men.

Overall carbohydrate consumption seems to be a problem for a lot of vegetarians. "An American vegetarian frequently eats a lot of bread and pastas. That's because they're easy to get. So they can be quite heavy because they're not eating as many fruits and vegetables as they are bread substances," avers Dr. Evslin. This applies to the diet our Hindu college students are exposed to in the US; and at home in the West or in India the same can be said about the ratio of rice and rotis to non-starchy vegetables.

While it can't result in a significant amount of weight loss on its own, regular physical exercise plays a crucial role in metabolism, allowing glucose into cells without insulin. Dr. Simha notes that it helps not only in diabetes prevention but promotion of overall health,

adding that the current recommendations are to get at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise per week (30 minutes five days a week) plus two sessions of resistance/weight training per week. And, he counsels, "It is important to emphasize the intensity of exercise—a leisurely stroll through the park is unlikely to accrue much metabolic benefit."

What about prediabetes? When asked if those diagnosed with this condition should behave any differently than those with diabetes, Dr. Simha was firm: "No, they should be just as diligent, if not more." In all circumstances, whether you have prediabetes or diabetes, speaking with your doctor for advice is crucial. But doctors agree that prediabetes will undoubtedly turn into diabetes if no diet and lifestyle changes are made, and that's a transition that nobody should take lightly.

While individual choice is crucial in the maintenance of good health, there is more to the picture—governmental policies, farm subsidies, food marketing trends and regulations and the habits of billions of people. Dr. Kaufman shares, "We can't simply blame diabetes on gluttony and laziness. Nor can we assume that the sole solution is individual change. Listening to my young patients talk about their lives, I become angry at a society that doesn't seem to care, at an economic structure that makes it cheaper to eat fries than fruit, and at the food industry and the mass media luring children to consume what should not be consumed."

CULTURE

Hinduism Is Right Next Door

My journey toward Hinduism taught me that anyone who is sincere and open-minded can find a place in this most ancient faith

BY PHILLIP MINER

I stumbled upon Hinduism while trying to figure out what was missing from my life. I came from a tolerant religious background, having grown up in the Unitarian Universalist faith, which made me open to the validity of Hinduism. Still, until a few years ago it didn't dawn on me that this would be the religion to give me peace of mind and psychological well-being. As with many Westerners, I struggled to find my path, taking the leap, learning more and planting the seeds of genuine belief and appreciation.

It seemed like a daunting task. Too often, for Westerners, the necessary learning and participation in the culture seems alien. As a result, they never get started or even know how to start. Typically, they are filled with misinformation, with ideas like extreme forms of meditation (and self-mortification), with notions of making arduous journeys to plunge themselves in the Ganga.

I eventually discovered that Hinduism is a faith that anyone, regardless of race, social status or background, can embrace if they sincerely want to—and the key word here is sincerity. To be a Hindu, one has to believe in the culture, the practices and the philosophy with their hearts and minds.

When I became deeply interested, it was clear that I would not find everything on the Internet, or even in books. It dawned on me that the best place to learn was in person from real-world Hindus, and that can be as close as your next-door neighbor. Those who practice Hinduism can be found all over the world these days, and getting to know them should be a key part of one's experience with the faith, especially if one comes from outside. Thanks to the Hindu diaspora, that's easier than ever. A list of Hindu temples in the US can be found on Wikipedia. The highest concentrations are in New York and Texas. The fact that I live in Rochester, New York, made it convenient for me to engage with the local Hindu community.

My discovery started with the Art of Living organization. While the Art of Living doesn't overtly identify itself as Hindu, most of their teachings, I discovered, derive from the Hindu faith, and that was what inspired me to investigate Hinduism more closely. Some of the members of the local Art of Living chapter took me to the Hindu Temple of Rochester. I learned a lot from that short visit, and it definitely aroused a desire inside me to learn more.

Eventually, I had to ask what makes a Hindu a Hindu? How does an outsider, like me, come into the faith? In response, Uma Gupta told me a Hindu is "one who practices tolerance, who takes care of all living beings, sees the divine in everything and pursues righteousness and goodness against all odds." That sounded good to me.

For those who are sufficiently open-minded and genuinely embrace the above creed, the good news is that these days more Hindus than ever before openly welcome Westerners who wish to experience and even adopt the faith.

Exploring deeper, I discovered the three principles that are fundamental—worship, community and service. This led me to get out into the real world, find people who are devoutly Hindu and take part in their community. That did not mean that I was ready to book

the next flight to India. There was a more practical path that could ease me into the faith and culture.

My first step turned out to be as simple as finding a place where puja is practiced. When I started attending services in the Hindu Temple of Rochester, I felt a bit intimidated. All the practices seemed so different from what I was used to that I had feelings of loneliness. I felt like I didn't belong. I even felt fearful, that my presence and my thoughts might be despoiling these holy pujas.

While these feelings may be normal for outsiders, they can only prevent us from taking part in Hindu temple worship if we let them overpower us. If I really wanted to be part of the puja and benefit from this closeness to the heart of Hinduism, all I had to do was overcome my fear and take part, sit down with the crowd and meditate on the puja, chant along with the bhajans, enjoy in the arati. I even found the courage to ring the gong during the temple's Krishna Janmashtami! As long as you genuinely feel that the puja can uplift you, you can partake of it.

It was that realization which convinced me of Hinduism's fit for me. I discovered that it doesn't just teach tolerance for others—it teaches tolerance of oneself, a trait which I was sorely lacking at the time. I had problems with my self-image. Even though I was raised to be tolerant of others, it was Hinduism that finally taught me how to accept myself as well, thanks to its core concept of dharma, which essentially boils down to everyone and everything having a role and place in the universe. There is much more to Hinduism than dharma, of course, but this was the concept that finally convinced me to learn more about how Hinduism as a faith can benefit me.

My path has been immensely rewarding. I may have just started out investigating Hinduism, but then, in a short time, I found myself changing spiritually. As I dive deeper and deeper into my Hindu practices, I find myself happier and more spiritually confident than ever. And I've only been in this process for a little over a year!

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ANURAG AGARWAL

INTERVIEWS

Tackling Today's Thorny Issues

HINDUISM TODAY asked three insightful ministers four tough questions at the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference held in California in August, 2012

I We are encountering more Hindus today who avoid the word *Hindu* and use the word *Vedic* instead. What is your view on this?

Swami Parameshananda: As my guru, Swami Pranavanandaji, said, all Hindus, believers of Hindu Gods, should come under the word *Hinduism*. Vedic tradition cannot be inclusive of all Hindus because this is a very intricate scripture, and the people nowadays, youths nowadays, are not ready for that, because it's not something they can study and put into practice. Yes, there are specialized teachers coming from institutions in India bringing the *Vedas* here, but not enough people have access to it, neither the time, and it's not very appealing.

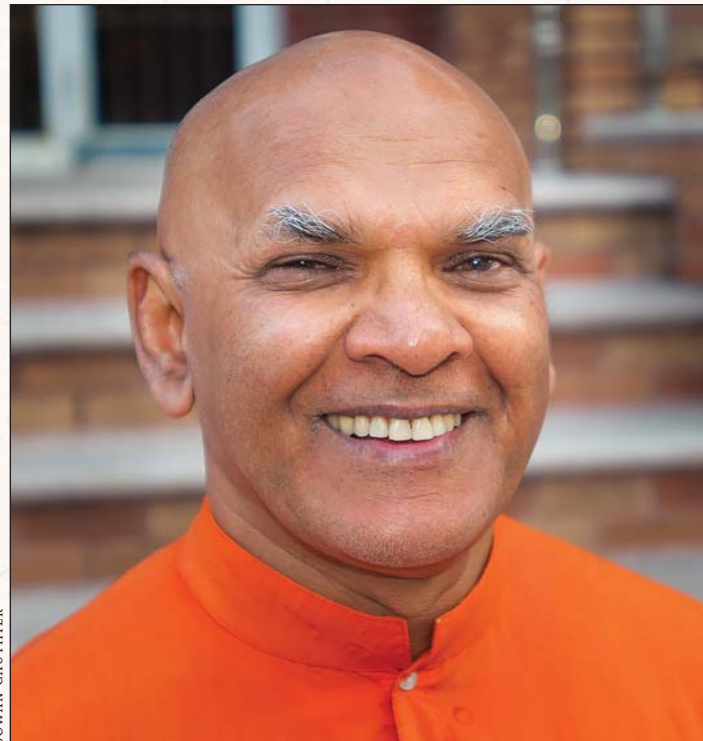
If we go under the umbrella of Hinduism, then we'll have the might and power to take it to the world at large. All Christians call themselves Christians, all Muslims call themselves Muslims. They don't use a different name. All the different faiths of Hinduism should come under the umbrella of Hinduism. This will be our savior from the world in the long run, and it will give us the opportunity to participate in interfaith dialogues and be respected, not be criticized by other faiths that we are fragmented.

Swamini Svatmavidyananda: Unfortunately the word *Hindu* has become a bad word. People don't want to use it because of the tremendous pressure within most colonized societies to become like the colonizer. We see this in India: everything foreign is good, even if it's a buck, because it has come from the US or somewhere else.

In other colonized cultures, the whole indigenous tradition was wiped out due to forcible conversions. India was spared because of the resilience of the Hindu dharma. Therefore we are very, very lucky. We were left with our culture and our tradition, but we were also left with the scarring of internalized oppression caused by mainstream colonizers' inculcating this hatred.

That is why there is great shame and dilution of our tradition, or a refusal to accept it at all. Due to this dilution, we have unfortunately seen established orders in India apply for minority status. This is very sad, and it shows that there is something wrong. The whole Hindu tradition is nothing but religious; there is not a single thing that is secular about it. Secular should mean that if I'm secular I treat everybody equally—all beliefs, all traditions, all people. But unfortunately, secularism has meant erasing myself, self-effacement in order to appease someone else, and that is not correct. This is the factor, embodied by the government and the media, that has influenced the Hindu heart so much that one will stick up for the Muslim neighbor and the Christian friend and not think about himself as a Hindu.

I have had this experience at world interfaith conferences where they will say, "Please, all the Christians rise," everybody rises. "All the Hindus rise," and I was the only one standing up! Afterwards I asked some of the people there, who said, "No, we are not Hindu. We believe in compassion," as though Hinduism is about non-compassion. It's ignorance, basically, causing self-hatred. And that self-loathing is a very sad thing, because it doesn't let us grow spiritually,



Swami Parameshananda: New-York-based United Nations and international representative for Bharat Sevashram Sangha

it doesn't let us grow into our full potential. That self-loathing has to be eradicated.

We have to network and educate. A meeting like this conference is good for boosting self-esteem. We have to boost our own self-esteem and that of others around us, because self-hatred brings us down. It's almost like the colonizer is sitting inside; the colonizer has replaced Bhagavan within, and that is what we have to change.

The inner landscape—perhaps we have to say the inner jungle—has to be pruned a little bit to eradicate this self-hatred through relating to Bhagavan, through being proud of our achievements, our culture, our understanding. The Hindus are generally proud of the past; it's the present they have a problem with. So we have to look for things in the present—icons, swamis, role models in all fields—so that this allergy for one's own nature is gone.

Sadhvi Bhagawati: The media is sensationalist. So, in the West Hinduism tends to be portrayed as radical, fundamental, a tiny percentage of what Hinduism is about. For example, we have the Kumbha Mela coming up. Watch the media coverage of the Kumbh: naked men with spears, nails that have been uncut for the last 20

years. It's sensationalism. It's not the fact that 130 million people have come together, with no advertising, no registration, no Facebook page, having gone through all kinds of hardships to get there—and more after they arrive, because there's no Hilton—and they're joyful and happy. It's not the martyrdom syndrome. It's because they know it's Prayag, the sangam of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Saraswati; it's a holy place. But the media coverage does not express that.

When Western media coverage of Hinduism focuses almost exclusively on a tiny number of radical, fundamentalist Hindu hardliners, it's not surprising that peace-loving, tolerant, accepting Hindus want to disassociate themselves from those positions.

I think one of the strengths of Hinduism also tends to be one of its weaknesses. We are absolutely embracing of pretty much everything: "You worship Krishna, great. You worship Siva, great. You worship Ram, great. You worship the Divine Mother, great. You worship that tree outside, fabulous. You worship your grandmother, great." It's all Hindu, and that's one of Hinduism's strengths.

The problem comes when you arrive in a country with a culture in which there is one way, one name; it's Christ or Adonai or Muhammad. Some are at a loss, and they start to wonder, "Am I really Hindu? What does it really mean?" They're looking for something to identify with that tends to be more specific.

When you take Hindus out of India and put them into a non-Hindu place, they need something to hold onto. They need to unite with other Hindus and understand that we are all Hindus.

2 In a mixed-religion marriage, what advice do you give to the couple about how to make their marriage succeed and how to approach religion when children are born?

Swami Parameshananda: It would have been nice if we could have caught it before it happened, but we're talking about when it has already happened.

I think the mother should be the key role-player in what religion the future offspring will follow. The mother is the closest to the child, and if there's any kind of separation in the future, the laws always favor giving the right to the mother to keep the child. The wife's faith is the dominant one in any home, because the mother is the one that is going to take the child to the place of worship most of the time. This is inevitable, and we should be prepared for it.

Sadhvi Bhagawati: The only real advice that you can give is to ask, "Can you find a sense of self, a sense of identity, a sense of connection to the world, separate for a moment from your religious beliefs? When you connect with each other, when you hold each other in your arms, you're not holding each other as a Hindu and Jew, or Hindu and Muslim, or Hindu and Christian, you're holding each other as you and as me, and that you and me becomes we. It's not that we've merged Hinduism and Christianity; we left them at the bedroom door. We merge into this divine union together. And are we able, when it comes time to make decisions about our children, to come into it the same way that we go into the bedroom? Can I leave my career, my makeup, my hairstyle, my clothes, my diamonds and this religion I identify with aside for a moment? Can we just be naked on every level, you and me, who love this child more than anybody on Earth, who are one with this child, and leave dogma aside for a moment, use our heart knowledge, our heart connection and our heart wisdom—what Pujya Swamiji calls our inner GPS—to guide us?" Otherwise you're going to butt heads forever.

On a logistical level, it really depends on the religion. There's no way you can prevent religious conflict if one of the religions believes the child is going to burn in hell if he doesn't follow that religion.

Swamini Svatmavidyananda: It is difficult, because religion is



Swamini Svatmavidyananda: Resident acharya of Arsha Vijnana Gurukulam in Pavo, Georgia, USA

not just a set of beliefs, it's also how we enact religion, just like how we enact gender and so many things. And in this doing, many possibilities remain. "*Kartum shakyam, akartum shakyam, anyathava kartum shakyam*: I can do, I need not do, I can do differently." We have to transcend doing and focus on being.

There is a reason why we are not called human doings; we are called human beings. So, we have to learn how to be, and learning how to be cannot happen unless I let the other person be. In a marriage there are already so many differences—the way of cooking is different, the way of eating is different. In an intercultural marriage it's not just the marriage; everything is different. This is something we have to live with; it is a growing reality of modern times.

I would tell the couples to focus first on teaching values that are absolute and universal, what we call *samanya dharma*, which means what is correct, what is incorrect, what is right, what is wrong. These are absolutes, and they are all there in the mandates. Then we have to focus on the interpersonal, *vishesha dharma*, how those values translate in living together. The maxim there would be "live without hurting another or getting hurt in the process." Finally, *svadharma*, minding one's own business. "You do what you have to do," that is really *svadharma*. Don't look into the other person's portfolio, asking, "How come you are not doing this? What are you doing?"

These definitions of dharma—*samanya dharma*, *vishesha dharma*, and *svadharma*—are extremely important, because they are not peculiar to the Hindu tradition. They should be something that is practiced universally. They are universal, even though we have a very sophisticated understanding of them in Hinduism.

When children come into the picture, it becomes even more important to inculcate in them these values. Children are very sensitive; they are influenced by how the parents think, how they act. So, to maintain that harmony in the child-rearing process is very



Sadhvi Bhagawati: Senior assistant to Swami Chidananda Saraswati of Parmarth Niketan, Haridwar

important. It's also important to give in, because when one willingly concedes an argument, one wins by growing spiritually. I would say to the couples, especially after having children, to compete with one another to lose an argument. Who will lose the argument first?

3 In your opinion, what is the most important issue needing to be addressed in the Hindu community in North America today?

Sadhvi Bhagawati: As I just concluded with the youth in their session, their connection to Hinduism is really what is going to anchor them and ground them in life. And even though this is a culture that says "more, higher, better, newer," it is also a world in which the top ten medicines prescribed fall into four categories: anti-depressants, anti-anxiety, sleeping pills and Viagra. In this country we have achieved everything, accomplished everything, obtained everything, but now we take pills to do what animals can do: a pill to go to sleep at night, a pill to wake up in the morning, a pill to convince ourselves that life is worth living, a pill to procreate. This can't be enough.

There is something else, and that something else is a connection to something that makes each of us feel like we are not alone with the whole world on our shoulders, that makes us feel it's not all about me. What our religion gives us is a connection to something that's real, unchanging, deep, something that's higher, profound, that makes us understand: "Oh, now I get it! This is all set design; this is all just decoration on the stage." What Hindus have in their culture is a ready-made answer to whatever ails them—how to live their life, how to live a married life, how to have a family, how to have a career. Whether you're looking at the scriptures, the teachings of the great rishis, saints and sages, the wonderful historic examples that we have, wherever you go, there's an answer.

What's really important is to not get starry-eyed over the glamour, glitz and allure of people who think they have it all, but to stay anchored, to stay grounded. This doesn't mean to not be fabulously successful. You can be fabulously successful and fabulously dharmic at the same time, but don't forsake that which is really important for that which at the end of the day is just going to put you standing in line for a prescription at the pharmacy.

Swami Parameshananda: We should learn from our past that India has been conquered because of "divide and rule." Here in America we have the freedom not to fall in that trap again, because we're living amongst each other—there's no North and South India here. In New York City, let's say, people from all over India—North and South, whatever language they speak, Telugu or Bengali or Hindi or Marathi—are living in the same community, and our places of worship should tolerate that mixture of prayership. Sometimes in the beginning there might be a little resistance, traditionally so, but eventually the spiritual leaders should provide programs where all denominations can pray together. This way we will be united under the same Hindu umbrella.

The danger will be if we are divided. The Sikhs in Wisconsin are a very united people, and they will eventually get all the Sikhs in America to be united. This is God's way of making us united: when we are in the comfort zone we don't see the need for unity, but when tragedy strikes we're looking everywhere for support—mental support, support from the government, which should recognize the solidarity of the Hindus in America. Individually we won't be able to influence the political system, but as a people under the banner of Hinduism we can.

Individually we're doing well—we might be rich, professional—but as a people we haven't learned yet how to be united. In my travels around the world, not only America, I have found this is the problem Hindus have; we stay within ourselves, and we don't go out on the world stage and be part of the negotiation for world harmony. We should start by being united at home, here in America.

Swamini Svatmavidyananda: Bhakti: that is something we have forgotten after we emigrated from yoga bhumi to bhoga bhumi. This is bhoga bhumi, because this is the land of instant gratification. We forget the connection to the Ultimate, the nurturer of the soul for all beings. It is bhakti, which is devotion and reverence, that is the real key to success in everything. Bhakti makes one able to weather all storms. It gives one an inner strength. Most of all, it clears the heart, because bhakti is the cloth that wipes the inner mirror, the *antahkarana* mirror, and *shraddha* is the Windex. *Shraddha* is reverence and faith for the *Vedas*, for the teachers, for Bhagavan.

The only reason we don't have inner darshan of Bhagavan—the ultimate goal in the Hindu tradition (to understand the truth of what we worship as oneself), despite Vedanta, despite temples, despite all these things—is that the mirroring medium, the reflecting medium, is full of dust and dirt. This is what Bhagavan Krishna says in the third chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* when Arjuna asks why is it that, after all these teachings, as though by force, one goes down the wrong path, toward *papa* (wrongdoing), although the two paths are very clear—one is dragged down the wrong path even though one wants to do the right thing. Bhagavan Krishna says there is a film on the mirror. Just as the film on the mirror covers the reflection, it covers who you are. The *antahkarana*, the inner instrument, the mirror, is eminently cleansable. That is the ninth-tenths of Hinduism that is preparation, while one-tenth is knowledge.

4 How can we encourage youths to care for their elders at home rather than sending them to assisted-living facilities, as is becoming more and more common in the UK, US and India?



HINDUISM TODAY

Swamini Svatmavidyananda: In the Vedic tradition, when we have reverence, then there is caring. Reverence and caring go together. We are told, "*Matru devo bhava, pitru devo bhava, acharya devo bhava*" ("Revere your mother as God, revere your father as God, revere your teacher as God"). Even *atithi*, the guest, is an incarnation of Bhagavan. So, be the one unto whom your elders are incarnations of Ishwara. That cannot happen until you value your elders and the guidance they provide. We can coordinate in this country and in India and use the services of the retired people to teach their knowledge, their values, and the methods of inculcating these values in the younger generations. That is what makes it valuable and dear.

The reverence of everything as Ishwara—where the elders are also manifestations of Ishwara—is strong until the teenage years, when rebellion starts. In the difficult ages between 13 and 30, until they settle down and have their own children, youth tend to see an elder as another mouth to feed or something that takes up time.

The value of elders has to be inculcated, and the best way to do this is by example. We could have classes at old-age homes taught by elders who are able, thus providing constant contact between the younger and older generations. The younger generation are in crèches and day cares, and the older generations are in homes: this is the problem right now. So we have to have more contact.

Swami Parameshananda: I would like to speak from my experience. Our family of 11 siblings, mother and father migrated from Guyana to the US. Before I took *sannyas diksha*, I took care of my mother. I think she chose to come to where I was staying because she recognized the connection, the love that we enjoyed. While performing this great seva that my siblings were not in a position to do, I endured moments when she was very ill. She told me, "I'm going to bless you." I don't know what she meant by that, but I can attribute my later becoming a swamiji directly to her blessings.

I had a beautiful dream about a week after she passed away that she was ascending in an escalator while a beautiful bhajan was being sung, a bhajan that I know. I didn't see her as a person passing away, or old and not looking very well, but a beautiful mother. I felt that she ascended into the higher regions of the Gods. That mutual love between child and mother and mother and child contributed directly to my life. We can take that to the masses of the people, the children, and tell them that a mother's or father's blessing is better than even God's blessing. Let us endure their hardships, their difficulties, for a little while until they say goodbye, and we'll all benefit. All of us will get old.

Sadhvi Bhagawati: This is a symptom of a problem rather than the problem itself. Therefore, the solution has to go deeper than the superficial level. The core problem, the reason most old people are

Sharing knowledge: Mr. Sant Gupta speaks at the inaugural session of the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference in San Jose

sent to the home, is not issues like Alzheimer's or dementia. It's not parents who are a danger to themselves or to others—it's the basic issue of convenience. On a more fundamental level, the problem results from changes to our values, our priorities. With 24 hours in a day, we all have to make choices; we have to decide that this is more important than that. If people are saying they don't have the time or resources to properly care for their elders, the question becomes, where exactly are their time and resources going? What have they chosen over their parents? Usually they have chosen a job with potential for career advancement, events deemed important for social advancement and extracurricular activities performed for enjoyment or to fit in with one's social group.

To reverse this trend, we have to ask people why they think it is more fulfilling to spend extra hours at work or a social engagement instead of at home taking care of their parents, or why they keep a spare room available for a friend's occasional visits instead of sharing their room with that guest or sleeping on the couch so their parents can have that extra room. We have to help people understand what really makes our life fulfilling, what makes us feel, at the end of the day or the end of our lives, like we did something good. It's never the money, the extracurricular activities and the social engagements. But we never realize that until it's much too late. People who are in touch with what's really important don't have to be convinced to keep their parents at home.

How can we get back on the right track? Last night in my talk I shared a favorite quotation from Mahatma Gandhi: "What's the point of running so fast if we're running in the wrong direction?" That's what's happening with the Indian community that has moved abroad. In the effort to assimilate or acculturate, to prove something to someone—to American society, to the Indian society that they've left back in India, to themselves, to whom I don't know—there's almost an epidemic rush for more and more and more.

As Pujya Swamiji Chidananda says so beautifully, "Either you focus on your shelf or you focus on yourself." If we spend our lives trying to fill our shelves, at the end of it we realize that our self feels pretty empty. It's not about where you vacationed, what car you drive or your diamond necklace. We must return to the old values. These aren't just Hindu values; they are universal values. Hinduism happens to have the benefit of volumes and volumes of scriptures that tell us what is important, what our traditional values are.

Poetess and Minstrel, Parvathy Baul Lives and Dances in her Beloved's Divine Heart

Bengal's Mausumi Pairal heard Baul songs at age sixteen and was transformed. Initiated as Parvathy Baul, today she takes her Gurus' songs to the world.

Bengal's Vaishnava bards, the Bauls, form a distinct community, living a life of self-imposed poverty, dedicated exclusively to worship through the yoga of song. Once considered an auspicious spiritual asset in their rural farming society, they were supported by alms. But India's green revolution has robbed small family farmers of their independent livelihood. Today's Bauls have very few to beg from. So, like many of India's artists, the Bauls must find new ways to survive. Here follow the stories of one Baul woman and her husband, a Kerala master puppeteer, whose life's work is to express and preserve the ancient Hindu traditions.

BY RASHMI SAHAI, HONG KONG

HER HONEY-SOAKED, VELVETY VOICE is soothing to the ears; while talking, she often bursts into innocent laughter. Looks are deceptive. This beautiful, petite, saffron-clad woman with ankle-length hair boldly abandoned established society to join Bengal's mystic wandering poets, the Bauls. A singer, painter and storyteller, born Mausumi Pairal and now known as Parvathy Baul, she broke the umbilical cord with West Bengal and traveled to far-flung Trivandrum in Kerala to fulfill her spiritual calling. She now travels around the world to spread her Baul gurus' message of divine love. Parvathy Baul is now well known for her masterful solo rendering in the oldest style of Baul song and dance, using three traditional instruments, all played at the same time. I was fortunate enough to have her answer my questions, letting her tell her own story of life in the Baul world.

What attracted you to this path? I was first exposed to the Baul path as a 16-year-old art student in Viswa-Bharati in Shantiniketan. Phulmaladi, a Baul singer, would visit our campus and fill the atmosphere with her songs of prema [love] and bhakti. I was trained a bit from childhood in Hindustani music, but the voice of Phulmaladi was entirely different. There was a kind of unknown longing in her song and an indication of an inner path less traveled. This was my first attraction. I started visiting the



Immersed in bhakti: Parvathy Baul at the 2011 Nagur Sufi Festival in Jodhpur

Baul ashrams and learning from Phulmaladi. After a year, Phulmaladi suggested that if I wanted to be a true Baul, I should get initiated. One day I witnessed a performance by 80-year-old Shri Sanatan Das Baul from Bankura village of West Bengal. I was so

moved by the complete devotion and surrender of a sadhaka.

As a student of artistic expression, I had been searching for a true and unpretentious path. Baul gave me all of that, and it also gave me the inner world of freedom. This is what



ALL PHOTOS BY RAVI GOPALAN NAIR



A life devoted to "spoken truth": (left) Parvathy Baul with her ektara (one stringed instrument) and her duggi, hip drum; (above) Shri Sanatan Das Baul, Parvathy's diksha guru; (right) Parvathy with Sanatan Das Baul and his consort, Meera Dasi, in a photo taken shortly after Parvathy's vragya diksha (initiation)



I was looking for.

Once you decided to follow the path, how did you proceed from there? I went to Sanatan Baba in his ashram in Khoirboni. It was a spring afternoon and he was standing on a small porch, tall and dark, with his hair tied in a top-knot. He was full of compassion in the face of my curious questions. The first thing he asked me was if I had my lunch. I was then served delicious warm lunch by his daughters-in-law, Gita and Moni. He promised to talk to me later. The next fifteen days were spent on the same small porch. He didn't even ask my name. On the fifteenth day, on the way to the market, he started singing. I didn't know what to do, so I remained quiet. He looked at me and lovingly chided, "Stupid girl, why don't you also sing?" Joyfully, I started singing. This was my first lesson.

Sanatan Das Baul became my diksha guru. He initiated me in the same way he was initiated by his own guru, Nitai Khepa. The term *khepa* refers to a mystic fully immersed in celebration of Divinity, completely abandoning the things of the world, to the point of seeming to be "mad," just like Siva. Siva is a *khepa*, having abandoned his golden abode in Kashi and becoming an ascetic, ever immersed in Divinity, sitting in the funeral grounds, detached.

My guru used to take me with him when he went from house to house begging for alms of rice and vegetables. He taught me what he had learned from his guru. He then suggested I go out and learn from other gu-

rus to enhance my knowledge. You can have as many gurus as you like, but you can only belong to one gurukula.

What role does the guru play in the life of a Baul disciple? The guru is the most important person in an aspiring Baul's life. It is the guru who initiates you to the

"Truely mad was Shiva; He left his golden place, came and sat down at the cremation ground. Always drunk in higher consciousness, intoxicated in divine love and madness..."

path, which is otherwise not possible. It is the guru who infuses the grace and love in a disciple, transforming iron into gold. It is with the guru's grace that the disciple's heart opens like a lotus flower, to experience pure bliss within. A lotus flower blooms normally in the morning, but it is the sun's rays that touch the core of the flower, nourishing and nurturing it. The guru's grace connects one's soul to the Divine.

It is through the blessing of the guru that some sadhakas are able to strongly adhere to the path, walking till the very end, while others leave the path in the middle. One needs a guru to get the strength needed to walk on this path.

Do the gurus also impart a formal singing training? No (laughing), no, there

is no need of a formal training. This path is of complete love and surrender. Unless a complete surrender of the ego is made, one cannot be called a true Baul. Once you start singing, you abandon yourself in the complete bliss of the moment, you merge with the song, which is a vehicle to reach the Beloved. When you submit yourself to the Divine, where is the need of melody and rhythm?

A fakir used to sing at the door of Mirabai. He had no musical sense. People complained to Mirabai about him being off tune. They asked her, "Why won't you make him stop?" She smiled and answered, "Although he has no raag [tune], his song has no dearth of *anurag* [love, devotion]. That is why I love his singing and can't ask him to stop."

What kind of training then does a guru impart to the disciple? My guru, Sanatan Das Baul, taught me Baul songs for seven years. I used to sing with him in all the festivals. He taught me right on the spot while the concert was going on. He used to sing a song to me and I had to repeat phrase by phrase. This is the oral tradition. He was also very particular about teaching me the footwork of Baul dance and to play the *duggi*, the hip-drum.

Later, when he thought I was ready, he told me to go out and practice. This journey away from the guru is also essential for the spiritual progress of a Baul. During that time, one day, when I was singing in Murshidabad in

North Bengal, a professor and connoisseur of Baul songs told me about another Baul guru, Shashanko Goshai (she chuckles).

What makes you chuckle when you think of Shashanko Goshai? I am reminded of how I forced Shashanko Gosai to take me as his disciple. He was 97 years old and very hesitant to take a female disciple. To dodge me, he kept changing his house, but finally I tracked him down. He was not happy to see me, but I was adamant. Against his wishes, I sang him a song taught to me by my diksha guru. After that he could not say no to me outright, because he knew Sanatan Baba and had sung with him. However, to break my spirit, he made things very difficult for me. He refused me any place to stay in his house, so I slept outside in his courtyard. It was winter and I didn't have a blanket. On the second day I bought myself a blanket, but in the middle of the night I heard him saying, "My God! It is so cold." So I went in and covered him with my blanket. He didn't complain. These hardships continued for a month or so. I became disheartened, and one day I decided to give up. That very day, he decided to take me under his tutelage. After this, there was no looking back.

No one has ever taught me with such love and dedication as he did. Some days he taught me as many as 40 songs. He helped me to realize the depth and vastness of this tradition and inspired me to take the path of aloneness shown by great masters, whether in the music form or in the inner search. His patience and faith in me helped me become what I am today.

Can you tell us about your musical instruments? Each sadhaka chooses the particular instruments they will use. I use *ektara* (or *gopi yantra*), the *duggi* (or *bama*), and the *chilambu* (or *nupur*). I started using *duggi* and *ektara* because both my gurus also used them; however, there was no formal training.

Out of all these, *ektara* has a special place in the Baul tradition. It can be traced back to the *Sama Veda*. *Ektara*, or *gopi yantra*, is a traditional one-string instrument, made of dried pumpkin, gourd, wood or coconut shell and plucked with one finger. The *ektara* is usually held in the right hand and placed very close to the ear, which gives a constant Aum sound to the singer. The sound of *ektara* is synonymous to the sound of Aum, the *an-hat naad* or unstruck sound. Sanatan Baba

used to tell me, "We are only the bearers of *ektara*. It is the *ektara* which decides on travels, sings and meets people. We only are carrier of the *ektaras*. I found endlessness in its one string, enough for me to cross my life with this single string."

Duggi, or *bama*, is a small bass drum made up of clay and leather, weighing around four and a half pounds, which I strap around my body during the performance. Both *ektara* and *duggi* are tailor-made in proportion to the length of the body and arms of the user. I also use the *chilambu nupur*, anklet bells.

Bauls and both your gurus are in Bengal. Why did you settle in Kerala? For a Baul, the Earth is the bed and the sky is the roof. Bauls feel at home everywhere; they



RAVI GOPALAN NAIR

Guru's blessings: Parvathy learned hundreds of songs from Shashanko Gosai, who kept teaching her until his last breath

seek a realm beyond boundaries. So Bauls are natural travelers, traveling in search of the masters to seek knowledge. I came to Kerala in 1997 as a young student. I wanted to know our traditions, which are purely derived from the temple culture. In Kerala, temples and other forms of art and music are very well preserved. Here I met Ravi Gopalan Nair, my husband, and together we built up a Baul *akhra* in Trivandrum and also a space to meet other artists and practitioners. I have been traveling between Bengal and Kerala

since then, and also other places, to give performances, interact, learn, teach, share and meet masters of different genres.

Can you tell us about Rabindranath Tagore's association with the Baul community? Traditionally, Baul singing happens in the *satsangas* in the Baul ashrams or at the yearly festivals held at Baul ashrams, known as *mocchab*. Bauls also gather for annual *melas* [fairs]. The most renowned fair is Jaidev Kenduli Mela, which has been held each year in Kenduli village for the last 500 years. This is the village where the saint-poet Jayadeva composed his renowned work, *Gita Govindam*.

Previously the Baul performances and festivities were only in villages. It was Tagore who introduced the Baul tradition to the urban intellectual society. He started the tradition of organizing the Poush Mela in Shantiniketan. From here the Baul tradition spread far and wide. Tagore's own compositions were influenced and inspired by the most celebrated Baul composer, Lalan Fakir of Kushtia (Bangladesh), who lived around 250 years ago.

How would you explain Baul to a layman? Baul is an ancient yogic oral and musical tradition which influenced the Bhakti movement of Vaishnavas. Many believe the term *Baul* first appeared in Vrindavan-das's 15th-century *Chaitanya-Bhagvata*. Etymologically, *Baul* is thought to be from the Sanskrit *vatul*, "divine madness," a state of lightness where ego is completely transformed in the experience of pure love and true surrender, *bhakti*. [The colloquial Bengali word *batul* also means "mad," a person who is open and free, not chained to the mundane.] Elements of Siddha, Tantra, Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Sufism can be recognized in the tradition.

A Baul sings, "Crazy! Crazy! Everyone says I am crazy! But often I wonder, is it the world or me?" For the love of their Beloved, the Moner Manush "The Man of the Heart," Bauls surrender and abandon everything to unify with Him. Progress on this path is achieved through annihilation of all emotional, mental, physical and physiological bonds."

Bauls used to be a common sight in West Bengal, especially in the Bolpur districts of Bhirbum of Bakura, Murshidabad and Nadia. They wandered around, never settling down, leading a nomadic life, singing about the love of their Beloved. Social, political and economic changes have prompted the Bauls to settle, and now many ashrams have

been set up by the gurus. Many Bauls have comfortably adapted to urban living conditions; some are now even settled abroad. And while Baul performances used to be solo, today we do have some ensembles.

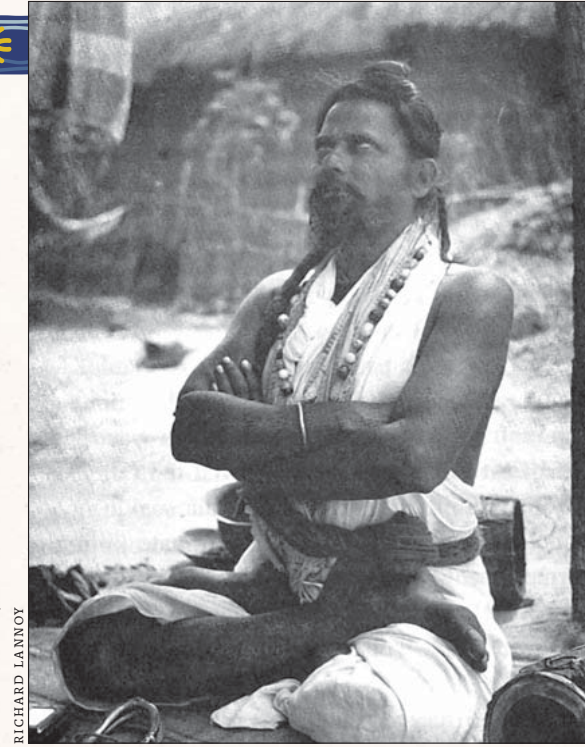
Can you say more about Baul songs and music? A Baul converses with his or her Beloved through songs and chanting, trying to connect with Him in the heart. Baul's unique songs are carried forward century after century through the master-disciple system. These metaphorical songs, based on mundane life experiences, are composed mostly in simple, colloquial Bengali. Their special language is called *sandhya bhasha*, "twilight language," and is loaded with cryptic mystical meaning.

The songs are known as *shabd jnana* ["sound knowledge,"] or *sahaja jnana* [as the Baul *sadhana* is also known as *sahaja*

More than a music man: This photo of Nabani Das Khepa Baul was taken in 1954 in West Bengal. He was not only a singer but a yoga adept, *avadhuta* and master of tantra. He was one of the bauls who most inspired Rabindranath Tagore. Nabani named Tagore Ravi Das. Subsequently Tagore introduced Bauls to urban society and then the world.

yoga.] They are deemed Spoken Truth or the Living Wisdom, for they erupt from deep inside the soul of the yogic body, from the understanding and realization of the *sadhaka's* heart. The first preserved Baul song was Charya Geeti, composed by 7th-century Bouddha Abadhoti siddha yogis, the wandering Buddhist monks, in the spoken Bengali of that time, similar to Pali.

Baul singing is meditation in motion, as



RICHARD LANNON

we sing, dance and play the instruments at the same time. When the heart and soul are soaked in the devotion of the song and the body is in continuous motion, the core enters a meditative state, still and silent. A Baul singer transcends mere aesthetic performance, breaking the barrier of the mundane to soar into a plane of sheer inner experience of spiritual seeking. Baul music takes its source and inspiration from the folk music of Bengal. Like Sufi *kalam*, these songs are speech oriented. We never say "sing a song," we say "speak a song," as these songs are for remembering the spoken truth of realized souls and of pure Love.

What keeps you strong on this path, when all around you people leave this path mid-way to tend to the practicalities of life? I am not sure who is more practical: someone who is attached to the Divine—when one unchangeable truth is that life is transient and only God is permanent—or someone who is cut off from Divinity and attached to the practical world, which is temporary. As the Baul song goes, "Some are mad for worldly attachment called love; some are mad for glory and pride; some are mad for material benefit; some mad for fame and power. They do not know what they are looking for. Always deluded by their own mad desires, they do not know the difference between the true and false."

Search YouTube for "Parvathy Baul" to listen to her music. Portions of this article are drawn from an interview conducted by Martin Harris. See sufijournal.org/an-exclusive-interview-with-parvathy-baul/.

The Baul Lineage's Mystic Message

Excerpts from Baul songs,
translated by Parvathy Baul

The Ananda Bazaar

O the mad one, O my heart
Let us go to the bazaar of Ananda
If you want have the true Darshan.
It is always day there, always shining.

No nights, no darkness.
It is a sacred space full and complete.
The sacred moon rises there.
The space is surrounded with Vindu,
As if the moon has shadowed the moon.
Go to the four-petaled lotus,
Awaken kula kundalini.

Find the stillness inside;
Find the silence in the heart and mind.
At the sacred space between your eyes
The jewel is hidden in the form of Shiva.
—Haure Goshai

The Practice of Dying

O my heart, do the practice of dying
It brings freedom from the bondage of
Birth and death; born to die,
Dying to be born again; death, birth,
Nothing but endless suffering.

Ida and pingala two Nadi,
Always chanting "Hamsa"
Thru the days and nights.
In the middle, the supreme sushumna,
Piercing all the chakras,
Swings in the two-petaled lotus
In the bhava of 'I am That.'
—Rasika Dasa

The Diamond Truth Tale

O my mad heart,
Where do you seek the divine treasure?
Leave all that insanity; be in silence.
If you want to attain the unattainable One,
Free yourself from all that is
Fragile and temporary.

Know yourself. Six thieves live in your house.
Go not to them. Go to the sweet invisible one that always flows in love.

Who is it awake in you?
And who is it asleep?
Who is it that dreams
While you are asleep in the night?
The One in the middle,
Hold on to His feet.

The main door of your house
Is beneath, in the patala.
It is locked. Open that door
By going beyond the conscious self,
The dark sky. And the door will open,
By the grace of guru. Be patient.
You will enter the door
And journey upward.

The truth remains.
It is neither born nor decays.
It can be realized in this body
Only through surrender to the guru.
Rasikadasa says, my mad heart,
Drink only the truth.
By knowing that worldliness is illusory,
Keep faith, my heart,
And the divine treasure will be yours.
—Rasika Dasa

A Kerala Art Master's Life and Vision Of the Roots and Evolution of Hindu Art

BY G.K. NAIR, KERALA

RAVI GOPALAN NAIR WAS BORN IN april, 1959, in Nedumangad, a small town in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala's southern district. He is a master puppet maker, puppeteer, wooden mask maker, performer, trainer, photographer and artistic director for many of the performing art groups of Kerala and the Bauls of West Bengal.

Ravi's career began in his father's professional photography studio. He worked there until 1981, then joined his elder brother, G. Venu, in Irinjalakuda, Trissur. Venu was working to revive Kerala's lesser-known artistic traditions. Ravi focused on breathing new life into Pava Kathakali, the glove puppet tradition of Kerala. He received training from the old masters of both puppet making and manipulation.

On the same campus was the Ammannur Gurukulam, run by the late maestro Ammannur Madhava Chakyar, who was working to save the ancient forms of Sanskrit drama, such as Koodiyattam, from extinction. Ravi recalls, "During this ten-year period with my brother, I was blessed to interact with masters of almost all the traditional dance, theater, puppetry and other artistry practices."

During this time, the outside world started to call him. "From 1984 on, there were occasions for me to serve as the artistic director for groups performing traditional Kerala arts at international festivals. Many of our village artists traveled outside India for the first time with me. I was careful in preparing them so that they would never feel inferior. I made sure our art was presented with the dignity of its lineage."

In 1992, Ravi left Natana Kairali and joined Parate Labor, a work project to redo the Para Theatre of Jerzy Grotowsky in France. From 1992 to 1995 he was trained there in the techniques of modern European theater, practicing over 16 hours a day. In 2000 he worked with the founder of the Bread and Puppet theater in Vermont, USA. Through the coming decade, Ravi was constantly on the move, presenting Kerala's dance and art through Europe and America. He was an artistic director in many important performances, including traditional Kerala temple dances never before performed outside India: the Thirayattom dance, presented in London, Switzerland, Amsterdam, Belgium and France by the Musée d'Ethnography of Geneva, Switzerland; and the Theyyam dance form presented by the Maison des Cultures du Monde at the Festival

de la Imaginaire in Paris. He also collaborated with the Musée D' Ethnography of Geneva in the production of *Sketches of Kerala*, a series of three documentary films: *The Gods Never Die*, *The Time of the Puppets* and *The Three Wise Monkeys*.

In 2011 Ravi was honored by the Madras Craft Foundation and Friends of Dakshinichitra with its coveted Virudhu, lifetime achievement award, for his work in preserving India's cultural arts.

Taking Baul Singers to the World

So how did a Kerala artist get involved with the Bengali Baul tradition? One answer comes from art critic/journalist Renu Ramnath, who told HINDUISM TODAY, "In 1997, during one of her vagabond trips, Moushumi Parial (who later became Parvathy Baul) reached Irinjalakuda and met the multi-faceted Malayali artiste Ravi Gopalan Nair, a photographer-turned puppeteer and mask maker. More importantly for Parvathy and other Baul singers, he was also a performer-trainer. It didn't take long before Moushumi married Ravi." Meanwhile she received her initiation in Bengal and became Parvathy Baul. By then

Ravi had moved into the international world of performance theater. Ravi and Parvathy collaborated, incorporating the Baul tradition in their puppet shows. The couple first appeared on stage together at the Brooklyn International Toy Theater Festival about four years ago, Ravi moving the puppets with musical support from Parvathy. Since 2010 he has been presenting a group of Baul singers led by Parvathy in many of the international and national music festivals in Italy, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland and the US. Thus, Ravi and his troupe, along with Parvathy and other



PARVATHY BAUL



A life dedicated to sacred art and spiritual goals: (top) Ravi with his guru, Karipoor Muhamad Abdul Salam; (above) carving the wooden heads of Kerala hand puppets; (opposite) a complete set of finished puppets ready to for the show.

Bauls, have been staging performances in India and abroad every year.

For Ravi and Parvathy, their partnership means more than marriage; it is a life dedicated to the traditional performing arts and the message carried therein. Ravi expounds, "There is a man in every woman, a woman in every man, according to the Baul philosophy. Finding the masculine in the woman and the feminine in the man is part of the practice."

Spiritual Heritage

Ravi shared his view of a life in which art, spirituality and the guru parampara traditions are not separate realms. Ravi is from a family of Saivite Siddha practitioners. He recalls, "Many of my relatives, both from the paternal and maternal side, chose to live as avadhutas [penniless monks who live beyond name and norms]. My father, a photographer by profession, was initiated by the great Variketti Swami of Manacad, Trivandrum, who always carried a bundle of clothes which he collected from various families. His studio was a meeting place for many avadhutas in those days." Ravi explained that Nedumangad is in the valley of Agasthyakoodam, believed to be the abode of Maharishi Agasthya. For centuries this small town has been a home for Saiva siddha yogis and avadhutas.

"Until 1940, many lesser-known traditions of performing art were actively practiced in Kerala. Now people are going toward academic development. Everything is getting mixed up without proper practical, hands-on training. We are different. We refused to go for academic study but stayed with the authentic tradition of personal training from our many gurus. We will not give up our path of the guru's kripa (grace).

"I met my guru in my father's studio at the age of 17 while I was assisting my father with black-and-white photography. His name was Karipoor Muhamad Abdul Salam, an avadhuta known as the mad man in the street who got beaten by police and others almost every day. He was a siddha. It was a teaching without teaching. He opened an inner eye to see the world. In fact, my guru took care of all my work, including the arrival of Parvathy Baul to Kerala so she could train with my guidance. I took care of his few material needs until 2007, when he left his body.

"My deepest love is for the avadhuta gurus, who have such a beautiful practice for handling the body and the world around it. I am touched by the intensity of their silence, love and non-possession. My guru weighed less than 62 pounds. He never performed any miracles, but they would sometimes manifest spontaneously. During the last year of his life, he remained stationary, never walking, as if waiting for something. He even let small ants cover his body. We cleaned him every day, but soon the ants would cover him again. We

could see that his intention was to be as if in a coffin, getting ready to leave his body."

Modern Changes

"Sadly, the infrastructure of our artistic and spiritual culture in Kerala is decaying. The famous Kodungallur Kovilakam Gurukula, which taught everything from Sanskrit, drama and ayurveda to elephant handling, is no more. The building has been taken over by the electric board, and I was told that even the precious palm-leaf manuscripts of this family were neglected—some eaten by white ants, and the rest given to people outside India.

"There was



PARVATHY BAUL

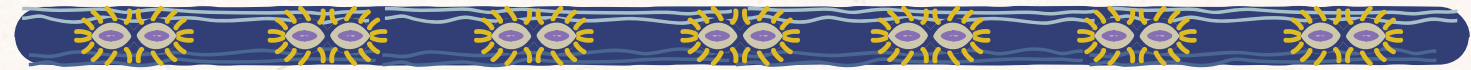
a time when every Namboothiri Illam and Mana landlord had a theater. A few months back we traveled with our puppets to these old estates. Unfortunately, since their rice cultivating land has been taken away by the government, most of the structures are dismantled or broken because they have no money for maintenance. We did our performance tour to those Mana as thanks for preserving those traditions until the first half of the last century.

"Similarly, in Bengal, the farmers used to be the patrons of Baul. Modern economic development programs have brought down the farmers, who have lost their dignity and place in society. Today every traditional art practitioner has to invent a new strategy to carry on the gurus' path.

"I give you one story of Parvathy Baul. She went to meet Shri Shashanko Gosai, one of the

oldest known Vaishnava gurus of Baul. Once he took her as a disciple, he started teaching her, at a high speed, all the songs from his memory. Even when they were on the roof of a farmer's house for fifteen days during a Ganga river flood, he continued teaching, saying, 'If we die in this flood, in our next birth we don't need to learn these songs.'

"He continued teaching her until his last moment of samadhi, at the age of 100. Three days before he passed, he called her to come to his home and went carefully over all the songs he had taught her. Then he declared: 'It is time for me to go.' He sat in siddhasana with a smile and left his body. That moment was witnessed by only two people—*Banamala Dasi* [his consort] and Parvathy Baul. He revealed everything to her before he left his body. The karuna [compassion] of the guru never fails and never stops its flow."



PHILOSOPHY

Time: Our Hindu View

Musings on the perennial value and profound implications of our vast cycles of *yugas* and *kalpas* spanning trillions of years

BY DR. ARVIND SHARMA

THE HINDU VIEW OF TIME HAS OFTEN BEEN described as cyclical, and often contrasted with the Western view of time, which is characterized as linear. That is to say, the Abrahamic religions believe that there was a point before which the universe did not exist, and God then brought it into existence "out of nothing." It will continue in existence until God similarly brings it to an end. A straight line connects, as it were, these two dots, of its coming to be and its ceasing to be. This Western view of time is said to be conducive to progress, as one marches forward in linear time. Hinduism, however, does not admit those two dots—the one indicating the beginning of the universe, and the other indicating its end. In mainstream Hindu, as well as Buddhist and Jain thought, the universe is without a beginning and an end. But, although without a beginning and an end, the universe does not stay the same—it undergoes phases of manifestation and occultation. Each phase of such manifestation has its beginning and end, followed by an equally long period when it remains dormant—until the cycle starts again. Within this large cycle there is another cycle during the period of its manifestation, as one Age succeeds another. This cycle consists of the four yugas: Sat (or Krta), Treta, Dvapara and Kali repeating themselves endlessly. This explains the description of the Hindu view of time as cyclical. In fact it could even be called bi-cyclical.

The duration of one cycle, called a mahayuga, is said to be 432 million years. A thousand of these cycles constituted a kalpa. The kalpa therefore is a period of immense duration. The Buddha replied with the following simile when asked how long a kalpa was. Imagine a mountain of solid rock, four leagues (perhaps 6 miles) in its dimensions. Imagine further that someone would come at the end of every century and wipe it with a piece of cloth made of the finest silk of Banaras. That mountain would wear away sooner than the kalpa would come to its end. And yet this kalpa is but a day in the life of Brahma, whose life consists of a hundred years!

When Western Indologists first came in touch with temporal vistas of such duration, they were inclined to dismiss them as merely fantastic. Moreover, as we were supposed to be living in the Kali Yuga, which commenced in 3102 bce, an age in which things were supposed to go from bad to worse, this scheme was considered pessimistic as well, apart from being fantastic.

The time has come, however, to reassess both these appraisals. The early Western Indologists were accustomed to the view that the universe was created in 4004 bce, as calculated by Bishop James Ussher. According to modern cosmologists, however, the universe is approximately 13 billion years old since the Big Bang. So these vast conceptions of time can no longer be dismissed as fantastic. In fact, it could



even be argued that it was when the West became aware of the possibility of such vast expanses of time, after being exposed to them in Indian culture, that its own mind was liberated from the confines of earlier biblical calculations and could begin to entertain the possibility of vast geological time spans, and subsequently vaster astronomical time spans.

But what about the historical pessimism implied by the doctrine of the four yugas? The standard explanation offered by many Indologists is that while decline is built into the cosmic structure of the system and cannot be averted, Hindu metaphysics allows the individual to save himself or herself from within the process, because in this evil Kali Yuga even a little virtue goes a long way and salvation is achieved with less spiritual effort than in previous ages. The dark cloud of Kali Yuga

came with this silver lining—that one can save oneself and become liberated, if one cannot save the world. This is soteriologically true as far as it goes, but is ultimately misleading if it leaves one with the impression that human beings are at the mercy of the Kali Yuga socially and politically. The fact of the matter is that the Hindu view of time may be cyclical, but it is not fatalistic. It is true that Kali Yuga is described as characterized by bad rulers but this raises the critical question: are the rulers going to be evil because the Kali Yuga as a period is said to be evil, or is the period evil because the rulers are evil? Or, in other words, is the king the maker of the Age, or is the Age the maker of the king?

In the *Mahabharata*, this question is posed by Yudhishtira to Bhishma, and Bhishma's reply is worth remembering: "O Yudhishtira, this is a question regarding which you should not entertain any doubt—the king is the maker of the Age." Even the *Manusmṛti*, which in its earlier sections describes the four Yugas, in the usual way, says in a section dealing with kingship: "The king is the maker of the Age. When the king sleeps it is Kali Yuga or the Iron Age; when he wakes, it is Dvapara Yuga or the Brazen Age; when he is ready to act, it is Treta Yuga, or the Silver Age; and when he actively moves, it is Sat Yuga, or the Golden Age." Small wonder then, that many kings in Ancient India epigraphically claimed that within their rule the golden age (Krta Yuga) had commenced, despite the fact that the one was supposed to be formally going through the Iron Age. Hindu political thought thus imparts to the Hindu concept of time a dynamism which overcomes its cyclical inertia.

The Hindu concept of time thus turns out to be neither fantastic nor pessimistic.

ARVIND SHARMA is a Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University. He focuses on comparative religion, Hinduism and the role of women in religion.



September, 2011: HAF's DC delegation celebrates the ninth annual Capitol Hill Reception



September, 2011: HAF's Executive Council, Board and staff gather in the new national headquarters in Washington DC.

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CANADA LAW DICTATES A WILL FOR THOSE WHO DID NOT LEAVE ONE

Canadian residents, which now include over 400,000 Hindus, should know about the will their Province has written for them if they die “intestate”—that is, without a will. In these circumstances “the surviving married spouse is often surprised by the way the estate is divided,” says Suzana Popovic-Montag, a partner at Hull and Hull LLP, a Toronto law firm specializing in estate, trust and capacity litigation.



Rather than a simple transfer of ownership to the bereaved spouse, Ontario law gives the survivor the first \$200,000 of the estate—the “preferential share.” The remainder is then split fifty-fifty with a sole surviving child or one-third and two-thirds if there is more than one child. In British Columbia, the spouse’s preferential share is \$65,000, with one-half of the remainder going to the spouse and one-half to the children. In Quebec, there is no preferential share; the estate is simply divided one-third to the surviving spouse and two thirds to the surviving children.

A written plan avoids such default formulas; but slightly less than half of Canadian adults have a will, much less a full estate plan, Suzana explained. “I find it difficult to understand why, after spending a lifetime amassing wealth, a person will not spend the relatively short time needed to plan for its distribution.” One factor that makes planning urgent is “deemed disposition” taxes. In Canada, the death of an owner triggers a tax on capital gains on assets that are owed by a deceased. This tax can be a significant liability of the estate. Another estate planning mechanism is the attempt to limit or eliminate probate tax on death. Many use joint tenancy to avoid the tax, Suzana explained, but this may cede unwanted control to an heir during life or expose a parent’s property to an adult child’s creditors. “Joint tenancy can be a litigation nightmare in Canada,” she cautioned.

We have seen situations where individuals use “elaborate tax planning to avoid probate tax. They will sometimes spend a highly disproportionate amount on legal fees to avoid what amounts to, at the end of the day, a nominal tax.” However, procrastination, not probate tax, is the most common estate planning problem, according to Suzana. “I’m too busy to get to it.’ ‘I don’t own enough to worry about.’ ‘If I write an estate plan, something is going to happen to me,’ are common excuses.” Clients often need a triggering event—the birth of a child or a serious illness—to motivate them to get their documents in order.

Hindu Heritage Endowment encourages written estate plans, for the sake of supporters and their families, and because without a written bequest neither HHE nor any other good cause is likely to share in the estate. “Some children may make gifts to charities they know their parents cared for,” Suzana notes. “Others show a strong sense of entitlement to the estate even before their parents’ death.” In Canada, a donor can pass bequests to qualified charities, like Hindu Heritage Endowment, with significant tax advantages to his or her estate.

More than a will is needed to complete an estate plan, she counsels. “Powers of attorney for property and personal care allow you to appoint someone to make vital decisions if you become incapable of making them yourself.” Suzana encourages clients to prepare written estate plans to ensure that their wishes will be carried out efficiently and at the least cost. She points out that those who die without written plans generate controversy among heirs and unwanted legal fees. “Our firm does a lot of estate litigation that arises out of intestate situations.”

For a list of Canadian attorneys and law firms specializing in estate planning, go to <http://www.canadianlawlist.com/>. For more information visit www.hheonline.org. For an estate planning toolkit write to hhe@hindu.org.



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Gajanan Nataraja	10.00
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Other Donations	60,000.00
Total	61,678.43

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Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund	
Microsoft Matching Gifts Program	200.00
Anonymous	184.00
Derek Baker	98.50
Gunavadee Caremben	2.46
Somasundaram Caremben	2.46
Sukanta Caremben	2.46
JuhiVaasana Koothan	4.94
Souda Koothan	65.57
Anil Kumar	27.00
Maragatham Kumar	100.00
Saroja Devi Manickam	2.50
Sivakavinian Moonesawmy	30.00
Jogendra Moorooogen	6.58
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	6.58
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
Hansa Patel	250.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98
Kasturi Raman	7.49
Hemavalli Sivalingam	1.92
Roshan Sivayogam	218.00
Vasanta Tanggavelu	336.08
Total	1,656.52

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund	
Anonymous	0.10
S.K. Ashokkumar	499.00
Bhaktavathsalam Athreya	499.00
Derek Baker	268.70
Chander Basho	299.00
Vinita Gupta	499.00
Kameswari Konduri	499.00
Souda Koothan	132.03
Bala Krishna	86.67
Sivaram Krishnan	1,001.00
Maragatham Kumar	200.00
Mina Gopal Majmundar	501.00
Dayavati Murugan	75.00
Hansa Patel	50.00
Kirtideva Peruman	19.77
Niroshnee Peruman	24.70
Veerabrahmam Prathikanti	299.00
Logavalli Sinsamy	65.74
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	12.86
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	12.86
Patudeva Sivaceyon	12.86
Potriyan Sivanathan	88.19
Snehal, Ranjany & Family	499.00
Kevena Soobramanien	191.45
Poobarlene Soobramanien	65.47
Vasanta Tanggavelu	653.85
Dave Vasudevan	499.00
Total	7,054.25

Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund	
Vel Mahalingum	26.31
Manogaran Mardemootoo	65.74
Vishwanaden Mooroooven	16.39
Total	108.44

Hindu of the Year Fund	
Rajendra Giri	110.00

Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment	
Mrunal, Padmaja & Pooja Patel	10,000.00

Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund	
Shyamadeva Dandapani	77.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	19.77
Carmen Debora Murbach	450.00
Gowri Nadason	169.82
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
Aran Sambandar	162.00
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00
Matthew Wiczork	25.00

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Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00

Hindu Press International Endowment Fund	
Hiranya Gowda	63.00

Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund	
Anonymous	311.76
Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Gassa Patten	1,350.00
Total	1,886.76

Saiva Agamas Trust	
Ganga Sivanathan	210.00

Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment	
Anil Kumar	36.00

Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund	
Shyamadeva Dandapani	77.00

Other Donations	
Anonymous	4,800.00
Total	5,799.59

Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam	
Anonymous	541.72

Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Nilakantan Mohankrishnan	50.00
Anonymous	500.00
Total	550.00

Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund	
Ganesh Kumar	108.00
Bala Sivaceyon	22.50
Total	130.50

Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund	
Anonymous	2,850.00
Michael R. Eisen	25.00
Shun K. Sunder	3,000.00
Vayudeva Varadan	108.00
Total	5,983.00

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment	
Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00
Anonymous	108.36

Thekkumbadam Vettakorumakan Temple Trust	
Narayanan Nair	3,199.42
Olivia Louise Nair	317.87
Susila Nair	6,268.52
M. T. Padman	1,598.91
Padmaja Padman	1,598.91
Vasudevan Padman	1,598.91
Total	14,582.54

Hinduism Today Production Fund	
P.C. Ghosh	90.00
Hiranya Gowda	93.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	30.00
Kanuji Parmar	51.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Sakuntalai Periasamy	37.60
Chamundi Sabanathan	108.00
Aran Sambandar	162.00
Ganga Sivanathan	516.00
Michael Zimmermann	6.00
Total	1,143.61

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund	
Srinivasa & Ratna S. Danda	117.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Nirmala Jetty	100.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	186.63
Alex Ruberto	125.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Niraj Thaker	11.00
Matthew Wiczork	20.00
Anonymous	108.36
Total	1,072.99

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Hiranya Gowda	63.00

Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund	
Anonymous	311.76
Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Gassa Patten	1,350.00
Total	1,886.76

Saiva Agamas Trust	
Ganga Sivanathan	210.00

Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment	
Anil Kumar	36.00

Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund	
Shyamadeva Dandapani	77.00

Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund	
Tamnash Gupta	108.00
Vijayalani R. Natarajan	252.00
Total	360.00

Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	
Rajadeva Alahan	153.00
Michael Zimmermann	6.00
Total	159.00

A. Saravanapavan Family Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00

Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Anonymous	6,563.87
Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00
Eleni Cannon	108.00
Umaphathi R. & Geetha Cattamanchi	1,001.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	101.00
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00
Gnana Family	20.00
Hiranya Gowda	150.00
Toshadeva Guhan	108.00
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Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Hansa Patel	101.00
Jigisha Patel	2,001.00
Alex Ruberto	75.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	108.00
Aran Sambandar	162.00
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Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00
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Anba Dayananden Valayten	8.58
Vayudeva Varadan	42.00
Raja Vishnu	127.00
Michael Wasylikiw	648.00
Total	16,571.14

Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Anonymous	441.72

Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired	
Alex Ruberto	100.00
Michael Zimmermann	6.00
Total	106.00

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	350.00

Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00

Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Bala Sivaceyon	25.72

Taos Hanuman Fund	
Anonymous	216.72

Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage	
Microsoft Matching Gifts Program	200.00
Anonymous	108.36
Michael Zimmermann	6.00
Total	314.36

Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Anonymous	744.72

Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund	
Harilela Ramon	200.00
Chiranjevi Raparla	150.00
Anonymous	441.72
Total	791.72

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment	
Anonymous	100.00

Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund	
Anonymous	20.00
Hiranya Gowda	153.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00
Total	213.00

Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund	
Shyamadeva Dandapani	77.00

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	
Anonymous	693.20
Jeri Arin	300.00
Christopher Brooking	11.00
Eleni Cannon	551.00
Marlene Carter	162.00
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	60.00
Dharmadevi Dharmalingam	47.00
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Siva Poomi School Trust	
Rajaratnam Selvaraju	10.00

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Sasikumar Darmalingam	16.00
Rajendra Giri	110.00
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00
Hagen Ramps	50.00
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Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment	
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India Hindu Tribals Endowment	
Kamalesh & Krishna Gangopadhyay	11,395.56
Niraj Thaker	11.00
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Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00

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Hiranya Gowda	99.00
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Kulagan Moonesawmy	19.77
Natraj Narayanswami	11.00
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00
Ganga Sivanathan	400.00
Niraj Thaker	11.00
Anonymous	325.08
Total	1,407.33

Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
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Natraj Narayanswami	32.00
Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00
Niraj Thaker	11.00
Anonymous	400.08
Total	494.08

Jaffna Kannathiddu Kali Kovil Endowment	
Anonymous	325.08

Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Ishani Chowdhury	175.00
Anil Kumar	27.00
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Jayshree P. Patel	25.00
Sunita Prasad	25.00
Indira Rajagopal	25.00
Sridhar Srinivasan	25.00
Total	201.64

Digital Dharma Endowment	
Anonymous	325.08

Insurance Premiums	
Mrunal Patel	3,003.00

Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Other Donations	600.00

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	\$217,223.52

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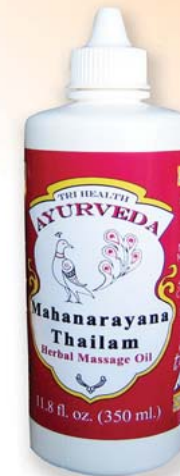
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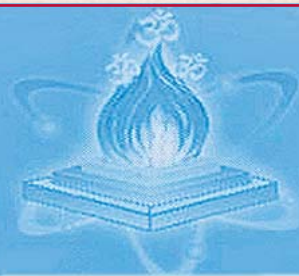
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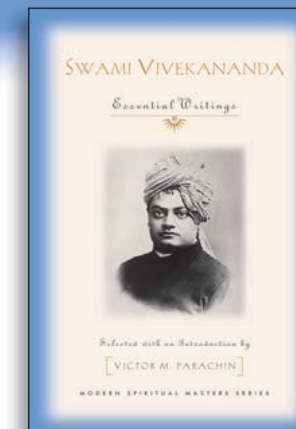
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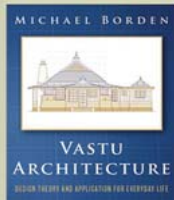
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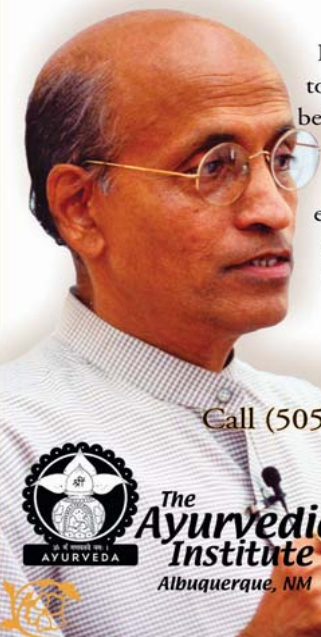
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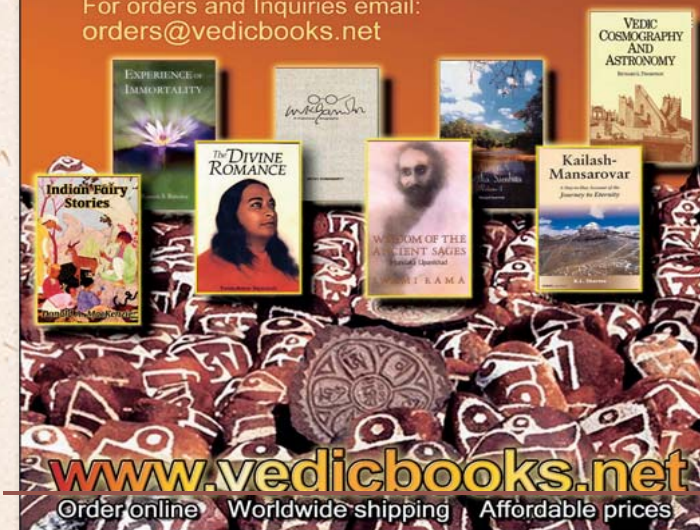
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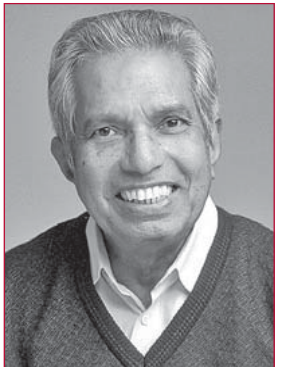


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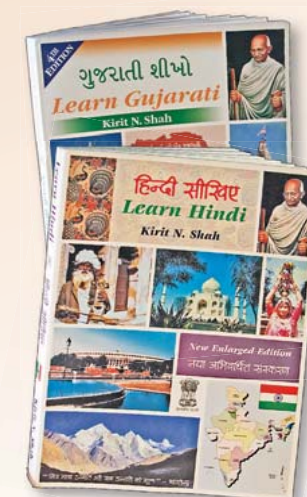
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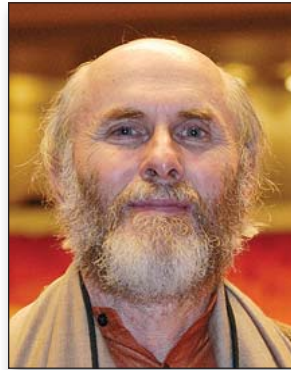
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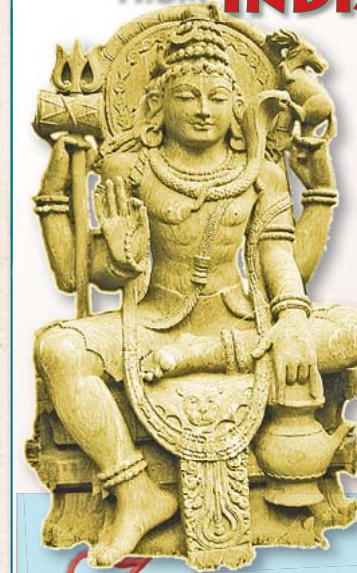
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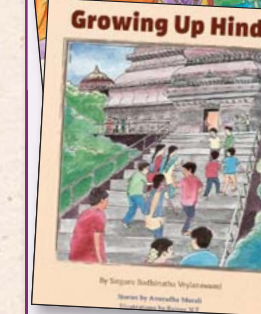
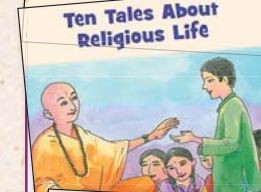
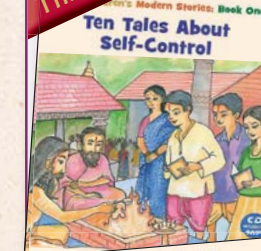
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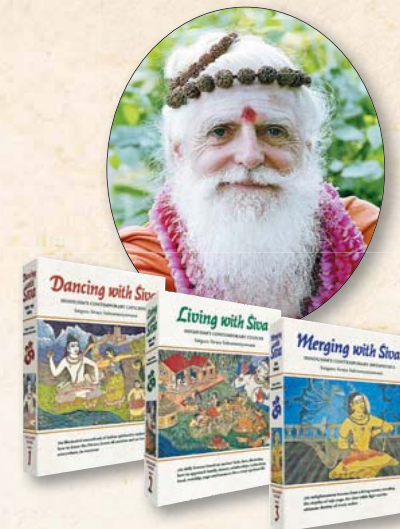
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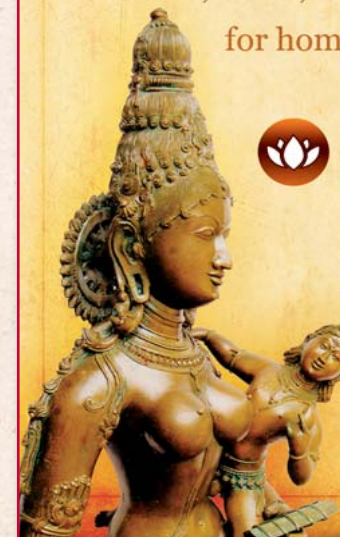


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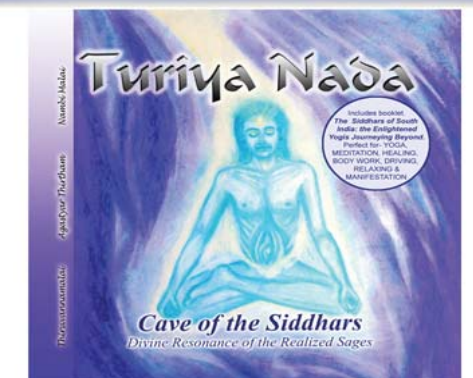
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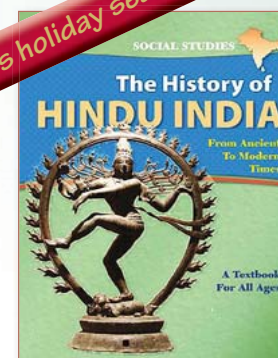
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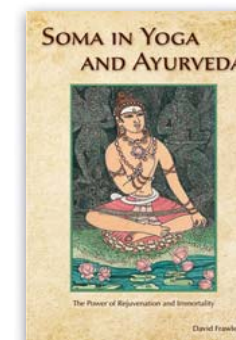
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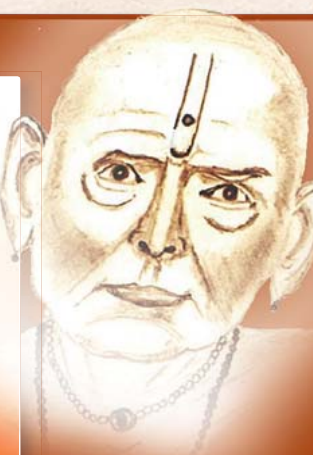
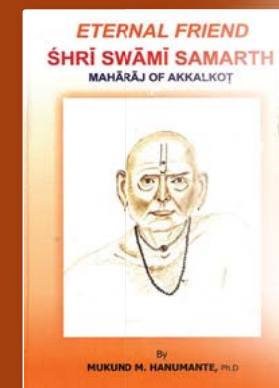
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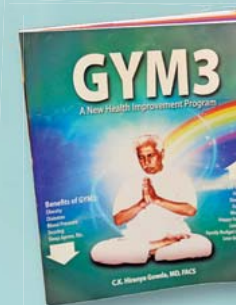
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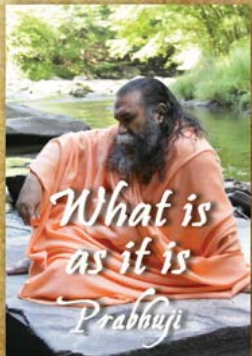
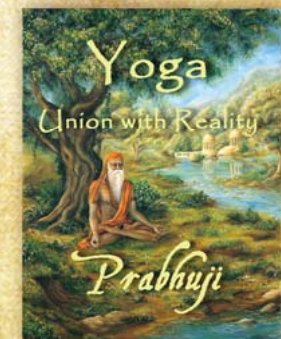
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DIGITAL DHARMA

WEBSITES

Himalayan Academy—Yes, That's Us—Launches Prodigious New Website

WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE A major upgrade to our paramount website, www.himalayanacademy.com, which hosts, in addition to Kauai Hindu Monastery's daily blog, the entire archive of our founder's publications, audio, video and lots more—a total of 18 GB of data! In terms of content, we believe it to be the largest Hindu website in existence.

Our previous website had some twists and turns. Despite a vast treasure trove of resources, it was hard for users to access them. Our old flat-file-based site was tedious to maintain and resistant to growth. The monastery's web outreach was not keeping up with modern technologies. Tackling these issues required funding, and the website's users responded generously to our 2010 and 2011 Digital Dharma Drives, contributing over two years toward the upgrade.

The monks first went into think-tank mode, in early 2011, to tackle issues of navigation and access. Following models from other resource-deep sites such as those of National Geographic and Apple, they prototyped a new navigation and entry-level page schema. They contracted with one of America's top design firms, Happy Cog, who helped them (at a generous, for-monks-only price) further refine and design the graphical user interface. In the meantime, Atritech in Chennai was hired to turn dozens of our publications—our core assets—into ebooks. Making the library available across all platforms and devices was, and continues to be, a key element in the upgrade strategy.

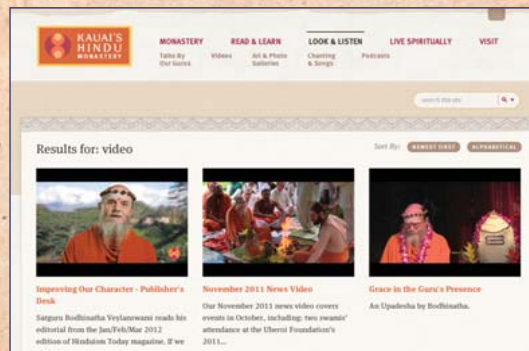
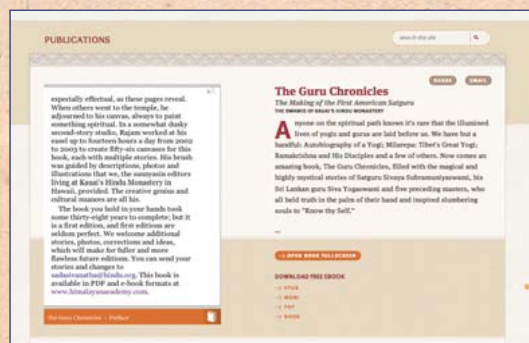
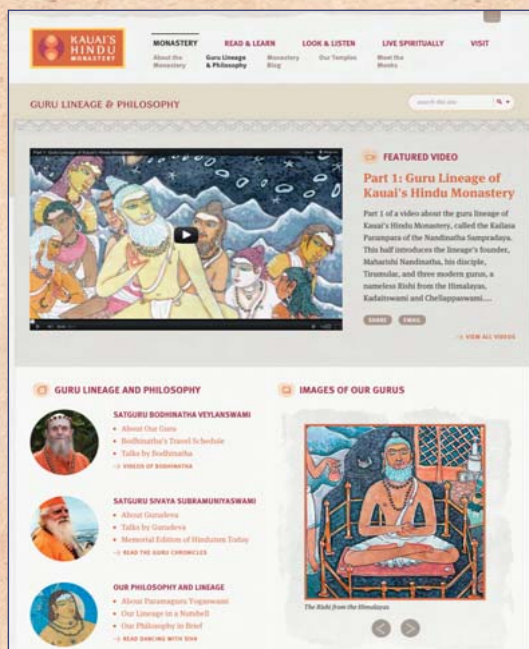
Next the monks began collaborating with a brilliant software engineer in Brazil, Andre Garzia, using Happy Cog's page designs, to build a new page-assembly system using LiveCode and RevIgniter technologies. The resulting website (see screen shots at right) is elegant, fast, easy to navigate and comprehensive. Books can be downloaded free of charge in popular ebook formats (PDF, ePub

and Kindle) or read online using Monocle, a web-based reader for ebooks.

The biggest change of all is behind the scenes: the site is now database-driven. The monks spent two years researching and designing their own media database, grounded on the Dublin Core and the W3C Media Annotation Initiative. Metadata about all the media, books, pamphlets, photos, artwork, slideshows and audio are stored in a MySQL database and presented dynamically. This allows the site to be easily scaled up, adding more and more resources. The database-driven design allows for the easier development of digital tools for education to support Hindu parents and teachers.

The new site gives access to all 2,000-plus audio and video talks by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. Hundreds of videos on various subjects, formerly only available on YouTube, can now be searched for and viewed on the site. A deep archive of rich photography is available in our slideshow archives, heretofore completely hidden.

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Screenshots of the new site: (top to bottom) The Guru Lineage and Philosophy page shows the site's new look and feel; Monocle on-site ebook reader for Guru Chronicles, (the reader allows viewers to flip through books right there on the webpage); the site's extensive video library page.

Other new or more easily accessible features are being added, including: 1) thousands of original paintings and drawings, many in Hindu themes and traditional Indian styles; 2) a new library of music, including traditional bhajans and the Natchintanai songs of Paramaguru Siva Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

The monks are grateful to those who contributed to the 2010 and 2011 Digital Dharma Drives, which supplied the funds that made this whole undertaking possible.

The new site will be up on January 1, or earlier, at www.himalayanacademy.com.